

GIANT FULL-COLOR PINUP OF TONY GAREA & RICK MARTEL

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PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED



Ric Flair vs Harley Race:
**THE PRICE OF BEING
CHAMPION IS BLOOD**



**Conclusive
Evidence:**
HOW BOB
BACKLUND'S
TITLE IS
SAVED
BY THE
REFEREES

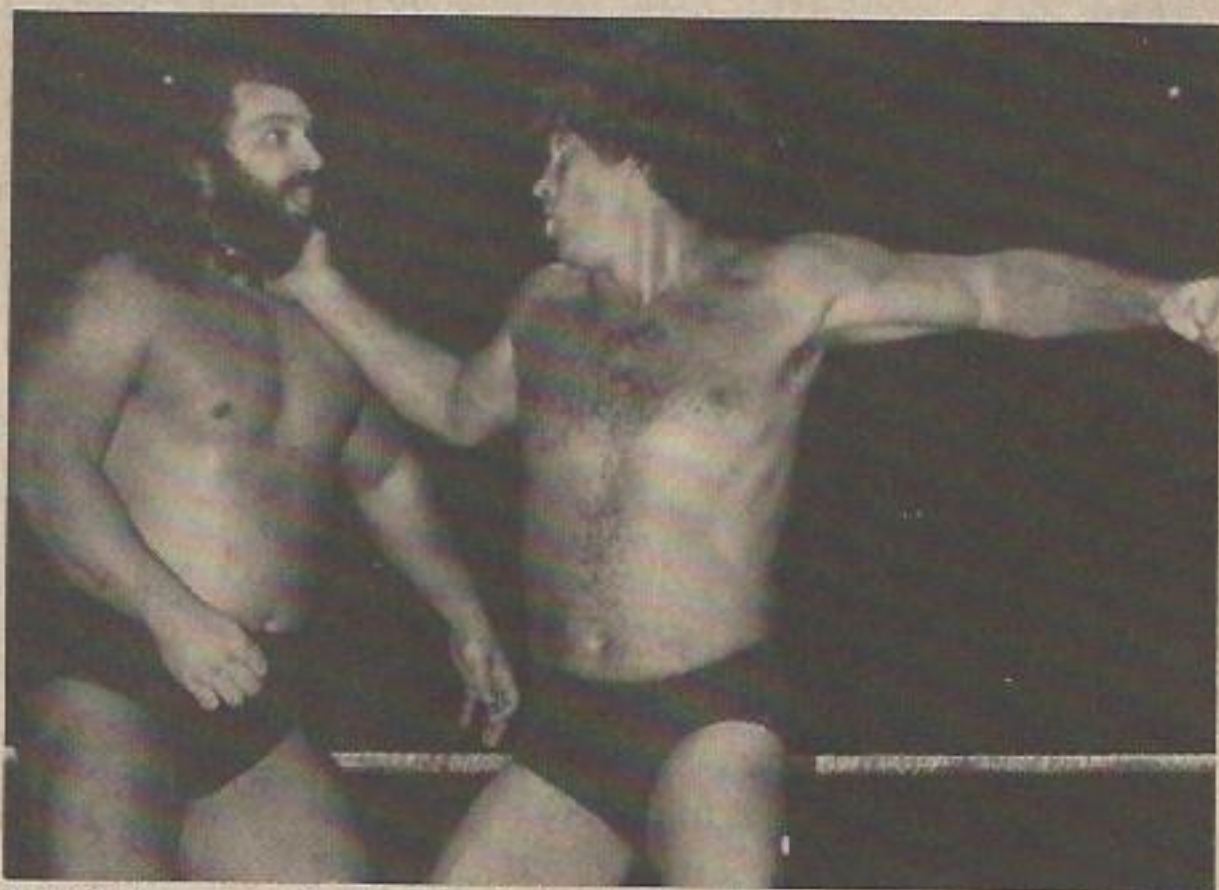
**KEN PATERA-
MAN ON THE RUN...
FROM HIMSELF**

**Special Ballot: VOTE FOR
THE TOP WRESTLERS OF 1981!**



KING'S COURT

By Peter King



Jack Brisco grabs Bruiser Brody by his beard and fires a long-range left hook. Brisco is regaining the form that brought him to the NWA championship in 1973. Jack defeated Ted DiBiase for the Missouri state belt in a memorable scientific encounter.

"DUSTY RHODES, all right, Wahoo, Tommy Rich, Koloff . . ." Jack Brisco's voice was a drone as he recited the NWA ratings. In Brisco's hand was a copy of the January 1982 *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*. "Peter Maivia, and last but not least, John Studd." Having finished reading aloud the top 10, Brisco closed the magazine and put it gently on the floor. "There seems to be a name missing, don't you think?"

Indeed there was. Jack

Brisco, a former NWA champion, was not rated. While most wrestlers would become loud and violent at such a slight, Brisco conducted himself like a gentleman. He was curious, not angry.

When it was explained to him that our ratings are based on performance and opinion, Brisco smiled. "What you're trying to say as nicely as possible is you guys thought I was over the hill? You folks had written me off as a title threat.



A familiar sight in 1973 and 1974: Brisco has successfully defended his NWA title.

Now I bet you feel just a little foolish." Brisco laughed, showing he had no hard feelings. It was the laugh of a winner.

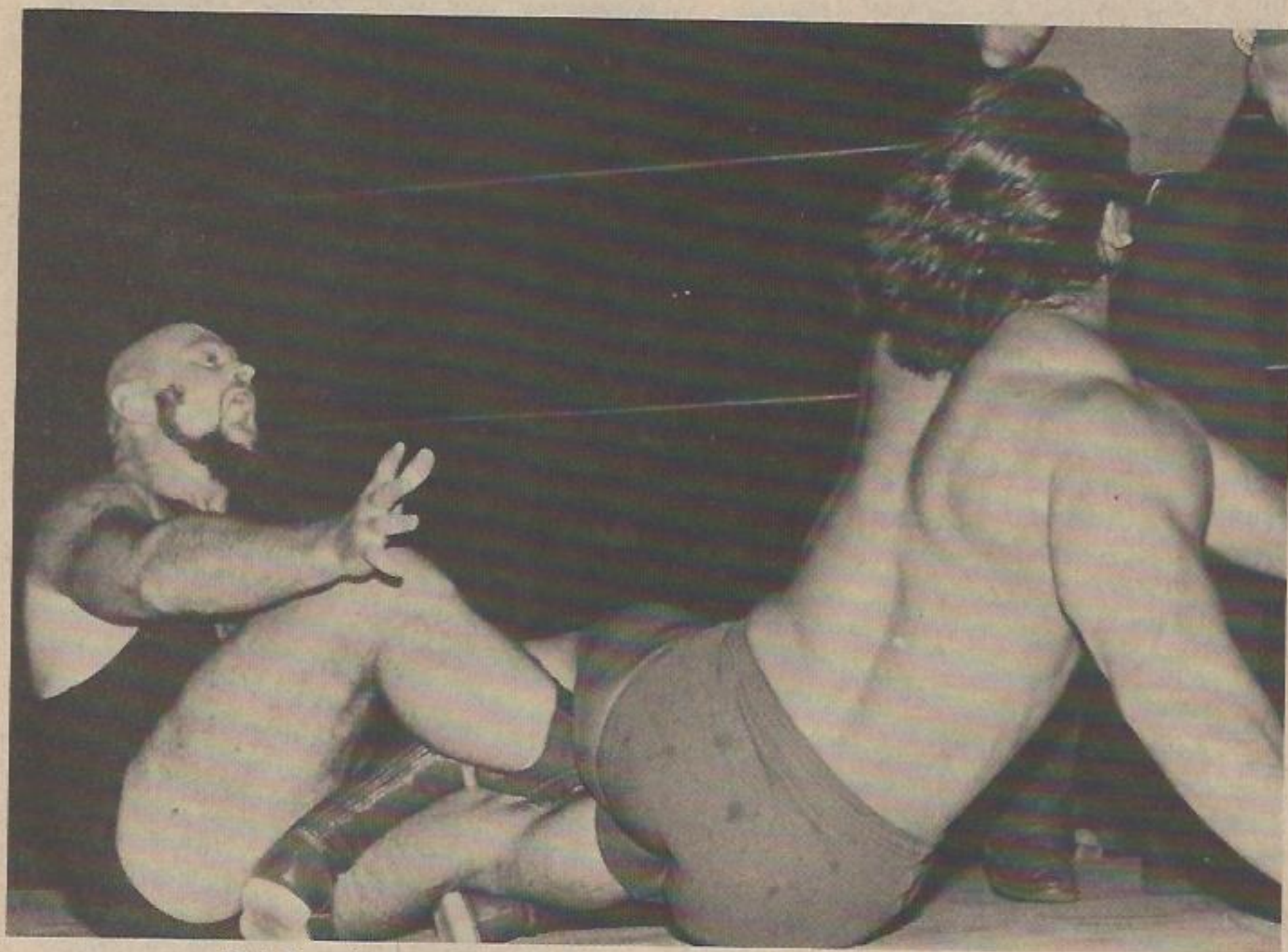
Jack Brisco is once again at the threshold of the world championship. After a few years of bouncing up and down in the ratings, Brisco appears ready to return to the form that made him one of the greatest amateur and professional champions in history. It is one of the great stories of the year, a testament that nice guys can finish first.

"There's no doubt I went into a tailspin for a while," Brisco admitted. "After losing the NWA belt to Terry Funk a few years ago, I sort of lost my direction. I got down on myself. I suppose I really did lose some confidence. And when an athlete starts doubting himself, well, it's trouble. Hey, I guess I was lucky to survive all these years. I look back at myself and

(Continued on page 49)

RINGSIDE

With Bill Apter



Rick Steamboat, applying the figure-four leglock that led to his Mid-Atlantic championship victory over Ivan Koloff, has set his sights on the U.S. belt held by the hated Sgt. Slaughter.

BLACKJACK MULLIGAN JR.'s feelings and pride have been hurt, and very severely at that. It seems Blackjack's friend, Wayne Farris, is also a friend of Blackjack's hated rival, Kevin Sullivan. Farris had to make a choice: either stay in with Mulligan and receive the wrath of Sullivan, Bobby Eaton, and manager Jimmy Holliday, or return to the open arms of "the fold."

Mulligan Jr. figured Farris would stay on the honorable side of the sport. But then an ugly incident transpired. Farris wrestled young Tim Horner and took the victory with a sleeperhold. As Horner lay unconscious on the mat, the Sullivan gang came to ringside and began screaming at Farris not to wake Homer up. Mulligan Jr. came to ringside and encouraged his friend to wake him

up. Farris refused, left the ring, and Mulligan woke Horner up. This angered Farris who, along with Sullivan's gang, jumped Mulligan and pulverized him. A feud, a very bitter and ugly one, has begun.

Rick Steamboat, who finally beat Ivan Koloff for the Mid-Atlantic title, is now after the U.S. belt currently held by the despised Sgt. Slaughter.

(Continued on page 50)

DRESSING CONFIDENTIAL ROOM

By Stu Saks

IF THE SPORT of professional wrestling wishes to gain control of approximately 50 percent of its participants, who, for lack of a better label, we call rulebreakers, it can do so. The sport, after all, is not without a rulebook.

Recently, the National Wrestling Alliance called a meeting of its top officials and promoters to discuss what it termed the "laxity of referees" and reinforced some of the rules that the Alliance thought were too frequently being broken.

The following rule clarifications are excerpted from the minutes of the meeting:

1) Ten count outside the ring on the arena floor to get back in the ring.

2) Illegal hold must be broken on four count; five count is disqualification.

3) Stranglehold is not legal. Repeated use of the strangle hold draws disqualification.

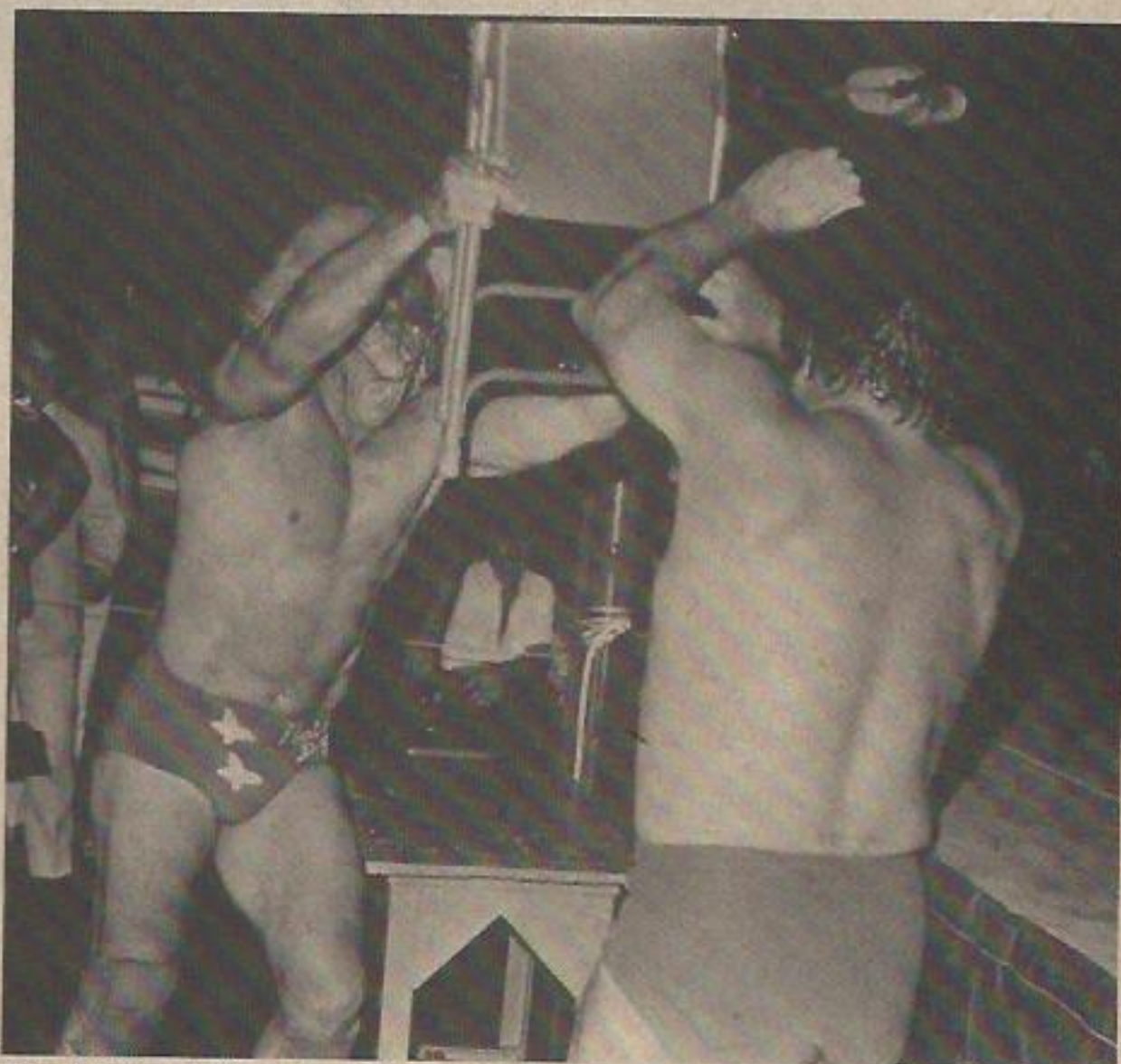
4) Jumping on an opponent from the top rope draws an automatic disqualification.

5) Eye gouging is a violation of the rules. Repeated eye gouging draws disqualification.

6) Contact on the arena floor is double disqualification.

7) Chop or karate permissible, except in or to the throat.

8) Punch with closed fist is a



The National Wrestling Alliance has taken steps to ensure that this kind of dangerous encounter between Ric Flair and Paul Jones does not happen again. As soon as both combatants touch the arena floor, the referees are to order a double disqualification.

rule violation. Repeated use of the fist draws disqualification.

9) Pushing, shoving, striking a referee draws automatic disqualification and also carries a mandatory fine and, according to the situation, can bring about suspension.

10) Continued verbal abuse of a referee can bring about a disqualification or fine, and

continued verbal abuse in or outside the ring can also bring suspension.

It is important to note that these are not new rules. They have been in the book, but sometimes are not enforced.

Looking closely at these points, the most drastic seems to be number six. Apparently the

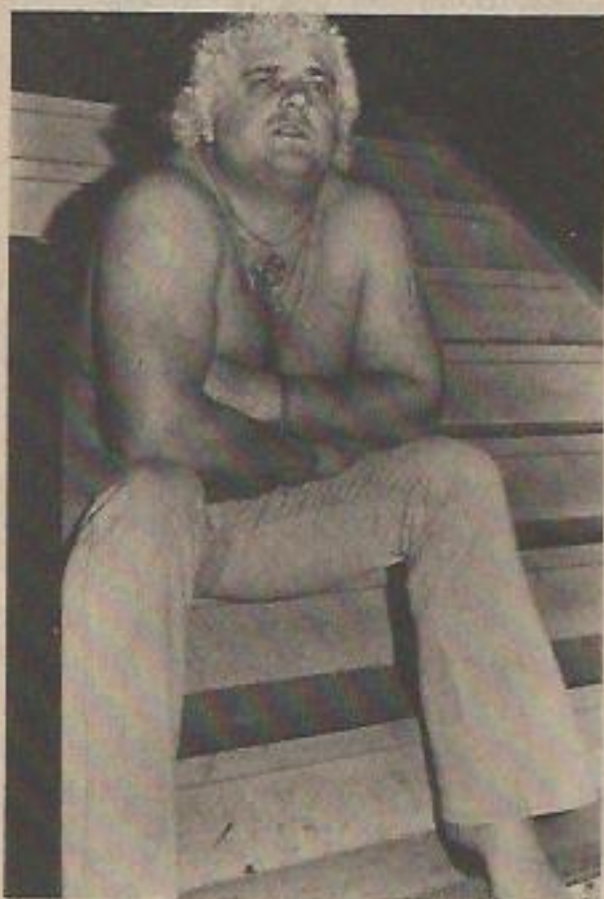
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A—ON— ASSIGNMENT

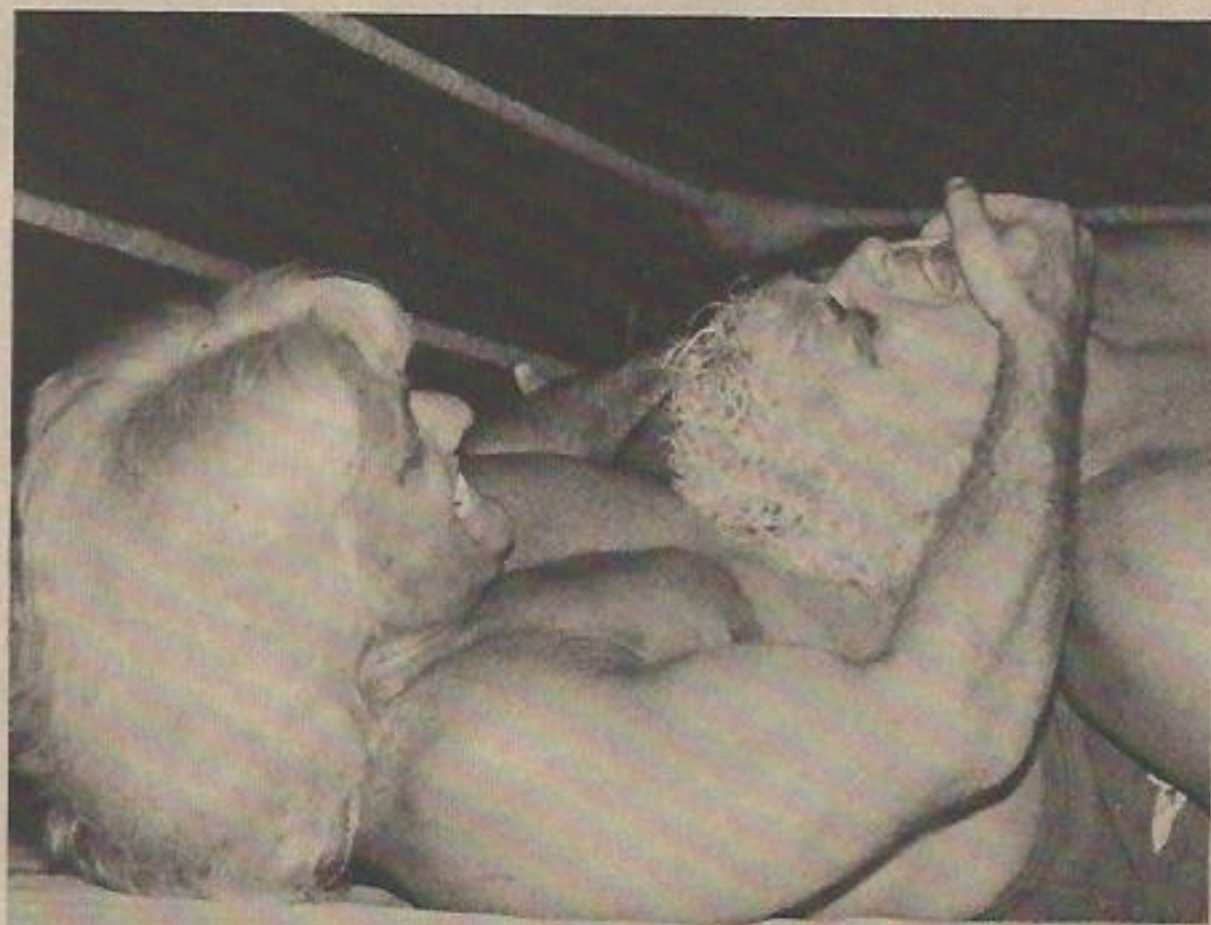
BY STEVEN FARHOOD

A DOUBLE ASSIGNMENT this month, the Hagler-Hamsho middleweight boxing title bout and an interview with the former NWA champion, Dusty Rhodes, both in Chicago. Hagler-Hamsho was a terrific struggle between two fine fighters. So much for boxing. Give me a couple of hours with a wrestler over the cauliflower-ear brigade anytime.

Interviewing Dusty was not easy. The American Dream has



been a top wrestling superstar for many years. The first time he won the elusive NWA title he held it for less time than it takes to fly to Bangkok. Harley Race won it back, and before Dusty knew what it was to be a champion, he was just another contender again. This time, the title reign was longer, 2½



Dusty Rhodes, who has held the NWA title for more than two months in his two combined title reigns, contemplates his future (left). Ric Flair punishes Rhodes en route to his championship victory (above).

months. Hardly long enough, however. Dusty was beaten by the new king, Ric Flair, in Kansas City.

I expected a fairly cheerful Dusty. He is an even-tempered man (don't go by his erratic ring behavior), and when I interviewed him after he lost the title the first time he was optimistic and hopeful. So when we met at the coffee shop of the Holiday Inn in Rosemont, Illinois (Dusty was in the Chicago area for a meeting with his tax accountant), I was shocked to see him depressed and downcast.

"How you doin' champ?" I asked him, faking a cheerful tone. Former champions in

both boxing and wrestling love it when you call them "champ." But Rhodes didn't go for the bait.

"Steve," he answered, "you know I lost the title. So don't call me champ, okay?"

Hardly a promising note to start an interview.

I ordered a bacon cheeseburger and rice pudding. Dusty ordered two helpings of blueberry pancakes, without syrup, and a bowl of cottage cheese. Right then, I knew he was in a bad emotional state. He *always* orders syrup with his pancakes.

"Is it worse this time?" I asked him, knowing he would know

(Continued on page 54)

WFOCUS

With CRAIG PETERS

LOU'S LATEST IS GREATEST

Believe it or not, a tip of the hat goes to none other than Captain Lou Albano. As tag team manager supreme, he has led nearly a dozen pairs to the WWF championship. Unfortunately, he's done it with combinations like the Moondogs and the Samoans. Now, he has come up with a pair that not only is likely to follow the Albano tradition of champions, but may actually deserve the belts as well! It's Mr. Fuji and Mr. Saito, and they are as fine a tag team pair as



SAITO, ALBANO, AND FUJI

you will find anywhere. Even though you may not feel Albano deserves any of your respect, take a second look at Fuji and Saito... they deserve consideration as tomorrow's potential champions. If you ask me, tomorrow is not too far off.



FLAIR VS. RHODES

END OF THE RHODES

This one falls into the "close but no cigar" category. Two months back on this very page I wrote that Dusty Rhodes is not quite my idea of the American

Dream, and that someone else should come along to dethrone him. At the time I predicted either Ted DiBiase or Tommy Rich. Well, like they say: close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades... but at least Dusty is outta there! Hearty congratulations go to Ric Flair, the new NWA titleholder. It remains to be seen how this champion will conduct himself in his new and important position, but the coming of Flair as champion is a breath of fresh air to everyone who follows the NWA.

TOO SELECTIVE

Nick Bockwinkel sits upon his AWA throne and continues to dictate who will and will not get a shot at his championship title. Well, Hulk Hogan has been trying for some time to get a title match, but Bockwinkel continues to ignore all requests for said match. It seems that a champion has the paramount responsibility to answer any



NICK BOCKWINKEL

and all challenges to his title, not only those he feels he can easily win. It looks as if Hogan may have to bring pressure against Bockwinkel in much the same way as Tony Atlas had to in order to get his shot at the title. It's a shame to see the state of title challenges come to this point. Bockwinkel should be accepting any title challenge that comes along, regardless of who it comes from.

If you wish to contribute to Shocket's mailbag, send your letters to:

TOP ROPE
Box 48
Rockville Centre, N.Y.
11571

OFF THE ROPE

By Dan Shocket

BEFORE BEGINNING THE serious business of this column, I'd like to quote a few Ted DiBiase jokes. As you might remember, I asked readers to send in jokes best describing Mr. DiBiase. Here are a couple of the best:

- Why did Ted DiBiase get fired as an elevator operator? He got lost on the job.—Jack Donahue, Taunton, MA

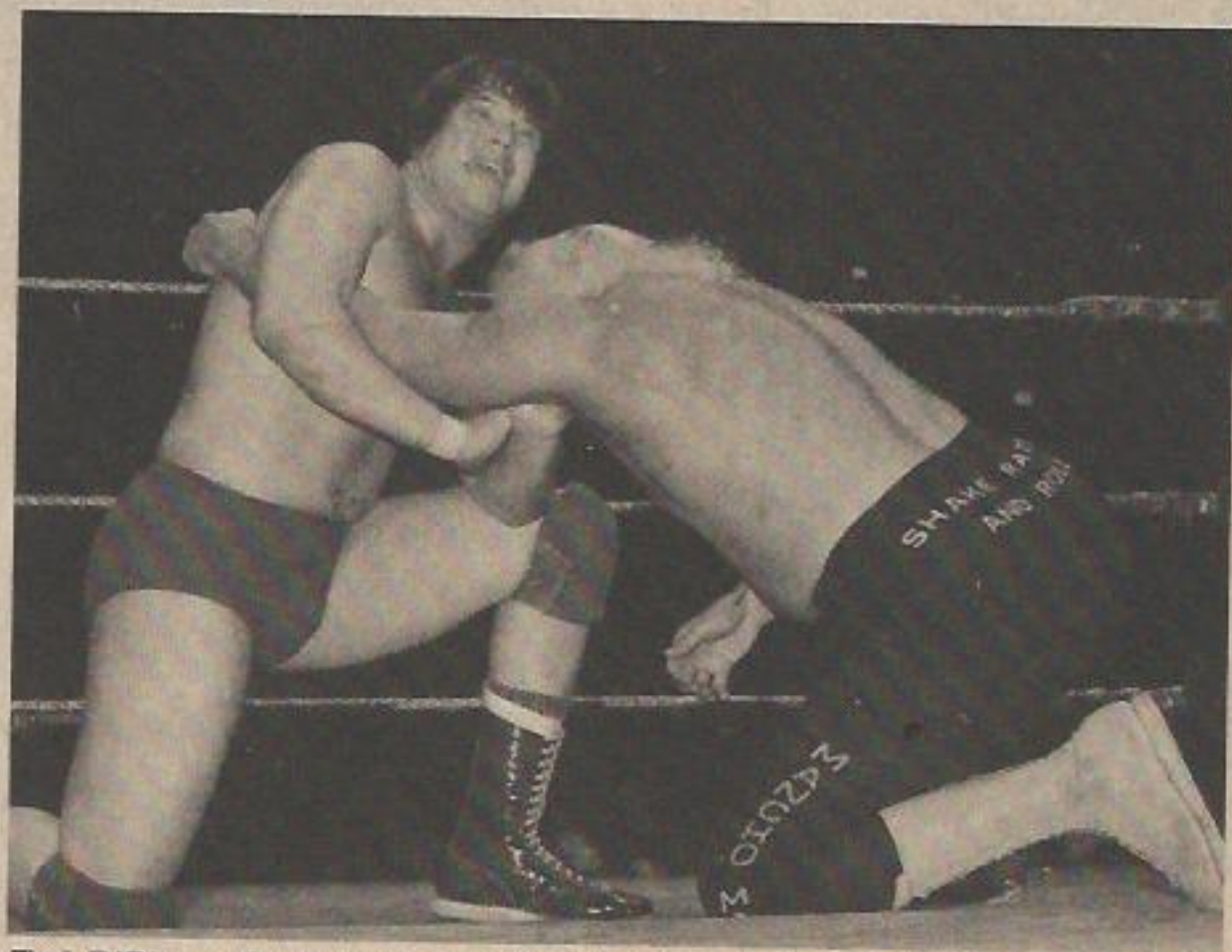
- Why does Ted DiBiase only smell good on his right side? He doesn't know where to buy "Left Guard."—Rick Shea, West Haven, CT

And now one of many differing opinions:

Dear Mr. Shocket:

Mr. Shocket, let's get right to the point. I'm reading *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*/September and see your column. I cannot understand why a human being such as yourself can talk the way you do about other human beings such as Ted DiBiase and Tommy Rich. They are very good wrestlers and very, very good people.

Why would you do something cruel like ask for Ted DiBiase jokes? If people send in jokes,



Ted DiBiase, the butt of everybody's jokes, locks up the left arm of Jimmy Valiant. Hey, the fun has just begun. If you people have any more original DiBiase jokes, send them along.

then they are dumber than you and that's damn dumb. If you had half the brains that Ted has in his little finger, then you would be half way decent. I don't mean to be getting nasty, but if we're all adults, as I assume we are, you're setting a very bad example for young people.

DAWN HAVERT
DeLand, FL

Dear Ms. Havert:

First, let me congratulate you on your restraint. Most of the letters objecting to the joke contest were written by people who use the bathroom wall as a dictionary. They were people whose lack of sense of humor was equal to their lack of any other sense.

Now, to answer your letter. I'm not here to guide the youth

of America. They can take care of themselves. They can also choose between the merits of a fraud like DiBiase and the true skills of a man like Ken Patera. They just need both sides of the story.

As for being cruel, we are not talking about a garden tea party. Wrestling is a cruel sport. Reporting about it must be just as "cruel," if you believe honesty is cruelty.

Dear Mr. Shocket:

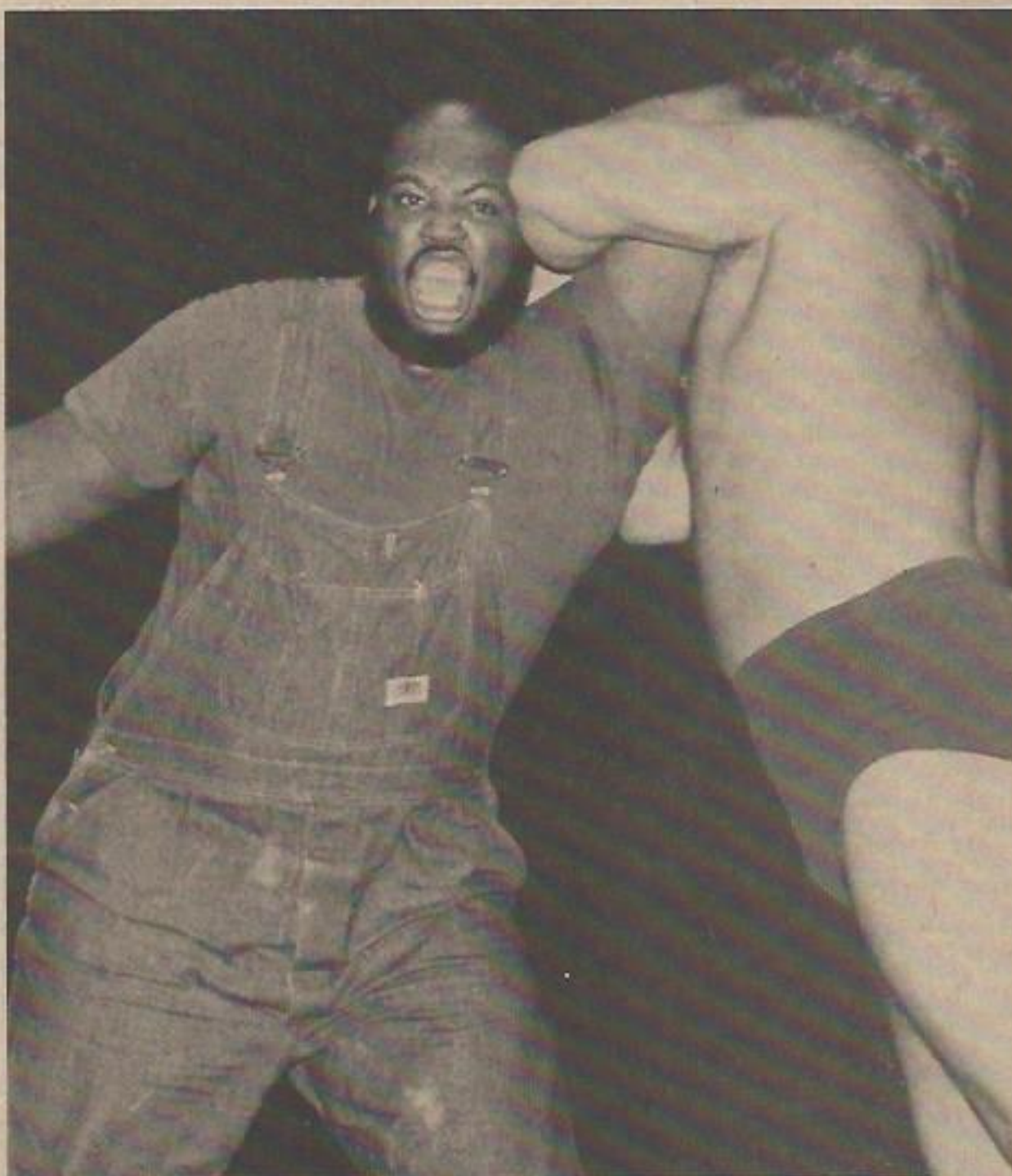
I would like to know what you think about wrestlers acting as referees. I don't like it, although I like "scientific wrestlers." I still think any wrestler, no matter who, deserves a fair shake.

When I last attended wrestling at Madison Square Garden, Pat Patterson was guest referee in a match between Bob Backlund and Angelo Mosca. Patterson counted slowly when Backlund was in danger of being pinned and "fast" when Mosca was being pinned. Patterson declared Backlund the winner even though Mosca's foot was on the rope during the pin.

Can something be done



Bob Backlund helps special referee Pat Patterson out of the ring after Patterson helped Backlund retain his title. Could you blame King Kong Mosca for hitting that bum?



It stands to reason, if Bad Leroy Brown can turn to scientific wrestling, I should start being a supporter of scientific wrestlers. At least that's the way wrestling fans reason.

about this? I would rather see a fair match than a prejudiced bout.

CHRIS CORDOZA
Brooklyn, NY

Dear Mr. Cordoza:

Hallelujah! It's about time the fans of scientific wrestlers realized what's been going on. Patterson just doesn't have the subtle techniques of a professional referee. They're all corrupt; Patterson just couldn't handle it. What can be done about this? Start booing when bums like Backlund are given matches. Let the commissioners know you won't be fooled.

Dear Dopey Dan,

While you still have the chance, join the scientific

wrestlers and forget the rule-breaking bums.

Michael Hayes did, Victor Rivera did, and so did Bad Leroy Brown. Dusty Rhodes held the NWA championship while slime Harley Race rots away. Bob Backlund continues to clean up the scum of the WWF. And to call Nick Bockwinkel a champ is like calling you a good writer.

Face it, Shocket, everyone's turning good, and before you know it, so will you.

ROBERT GARIPPA
Brooklyn, NY

Dear Ridiculous Robert,

Let's hope we both live long enough to see me become a supporter of scientific wrestlers. □

Every issue, three reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport

PRESS CONFERENCE

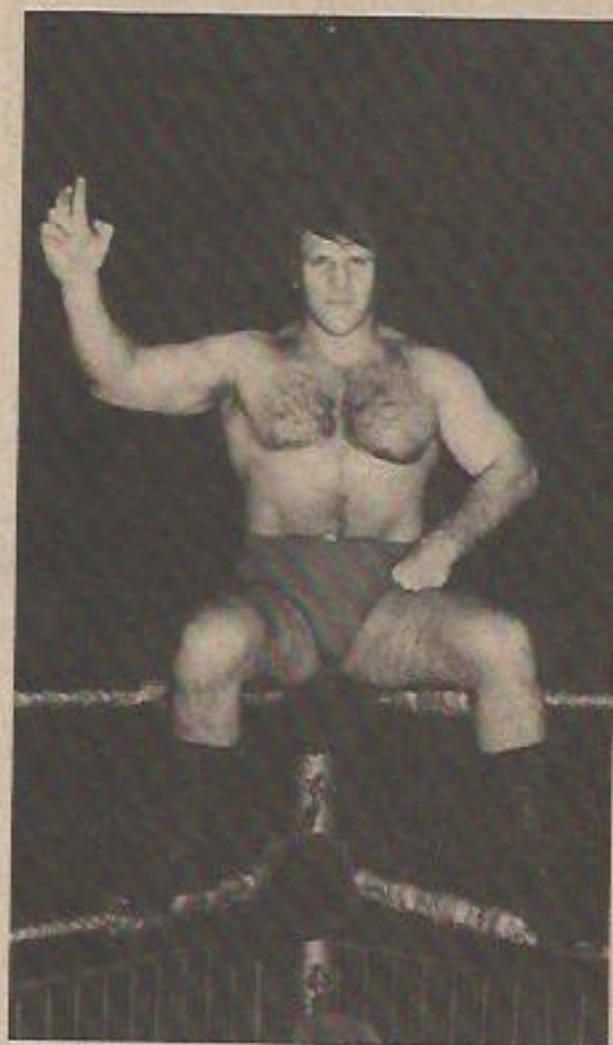
BRUNO
SAMMARTINO

(There is no possible way to measure the contributions that have been made to the sport of wrestling by Bruno Sammartino. His career has spanned more than two decades and he has literally written most of the history of the squared circle single-handedly during that time. His tenure as champion for nearly eight years straight is the longest in WWF history. Interviewed by Associate Editors Stu Saks and Steve Farhood, along with veteran wrestling journalist Matt Brock, Bruno talks about his career and his plans for the future.)

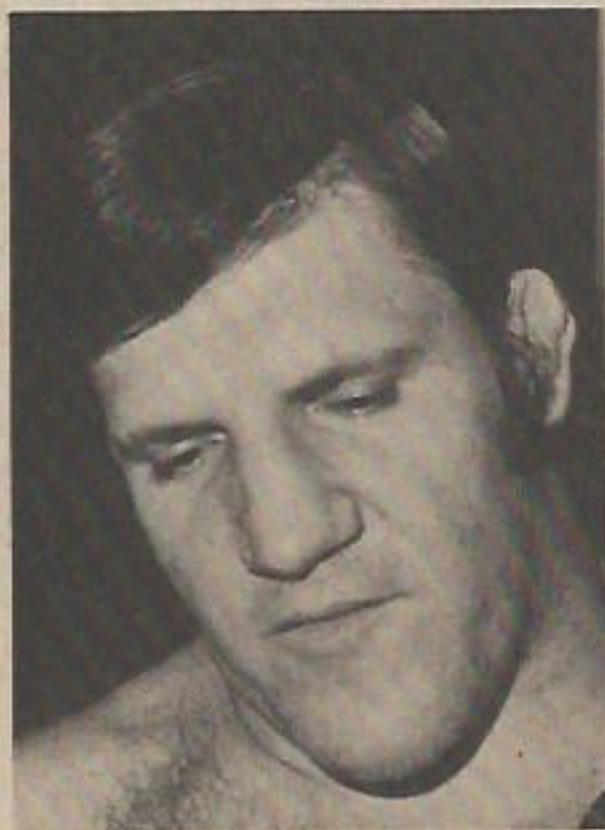
STU SAKS: Welcome to "Press Conference," Bruno, and I've got to say right off the bat, I'm a little disappointed that you've decided to retire.

BRUNO SAMMARTINO: Well, Stu, I want to thank you for your concern. A lot of people have been expressing the same kinds of thoughts to me, and I must admit that I'm very touched by it. It's nice to know that there are so many people out there, so many fans who are so concerned about what I'm going to be doing, and about the fact that I'm leaving.

STEVE FARHOOD: Why, exactly, are you leaving at this time? It looks to me as if you're in great shape. You could have



"I'm in a good position right now, I'm healthy, I'm strong . . . I'm getting out while I'm still ahead of the game, while I'm still on top."



maybe a dozen more years left!

SAMMARTINO: You know, Steve, I've been in this sport for 22 years. I'm in a good position right now, I'm healthy, I'm strong. I don't want to be in the ring 10 years from now and hear the people at ringside talking to each other, saying stuff like, "Hey, look at that bum. That's Bruno Sammartino. He used to be great once." That's a terrible thing to have happen to anybody, and doggone it, it's not gonna happen to me. I'm getting out while I'm ahead of the game, while I'm still on top.

SAKS: What about the charges that the return of Larry Zbyszko is forcing you into retirement?

SAMMARTINO: Zbyszko is a *buffo*, a buffoon. The people who make such charges are even worse. I won't even stoop to answer them.

MATT BROCK: Bruno, you've had some great matches over the years, but your match against Buddy Rogers in '63 has to be the peak.

SAMMARTINO: That's right, Matt, May 17, 1963 to be exact. Earlier in that year, there was a lot of controversy going on between some promoters in the Northeast and the National Wrestling Alliance. The WWF was formed out of that controversy, and Buddy Rogers won the title in a tournament. Well, May 17 rolled around,

and I got my shot at the champion. I got to tell you, it made the Gerry Cooney-Ken Norton fight look like it went the distance! I finished off Rogers in 48 seconds flat! Less than a minute to gain the title, and my reign lasted for almost eight years. Well, seven years, eight months, and one day to be exact. Anyway, it was the longest title reign in WWF history, and I'm very proud about that.

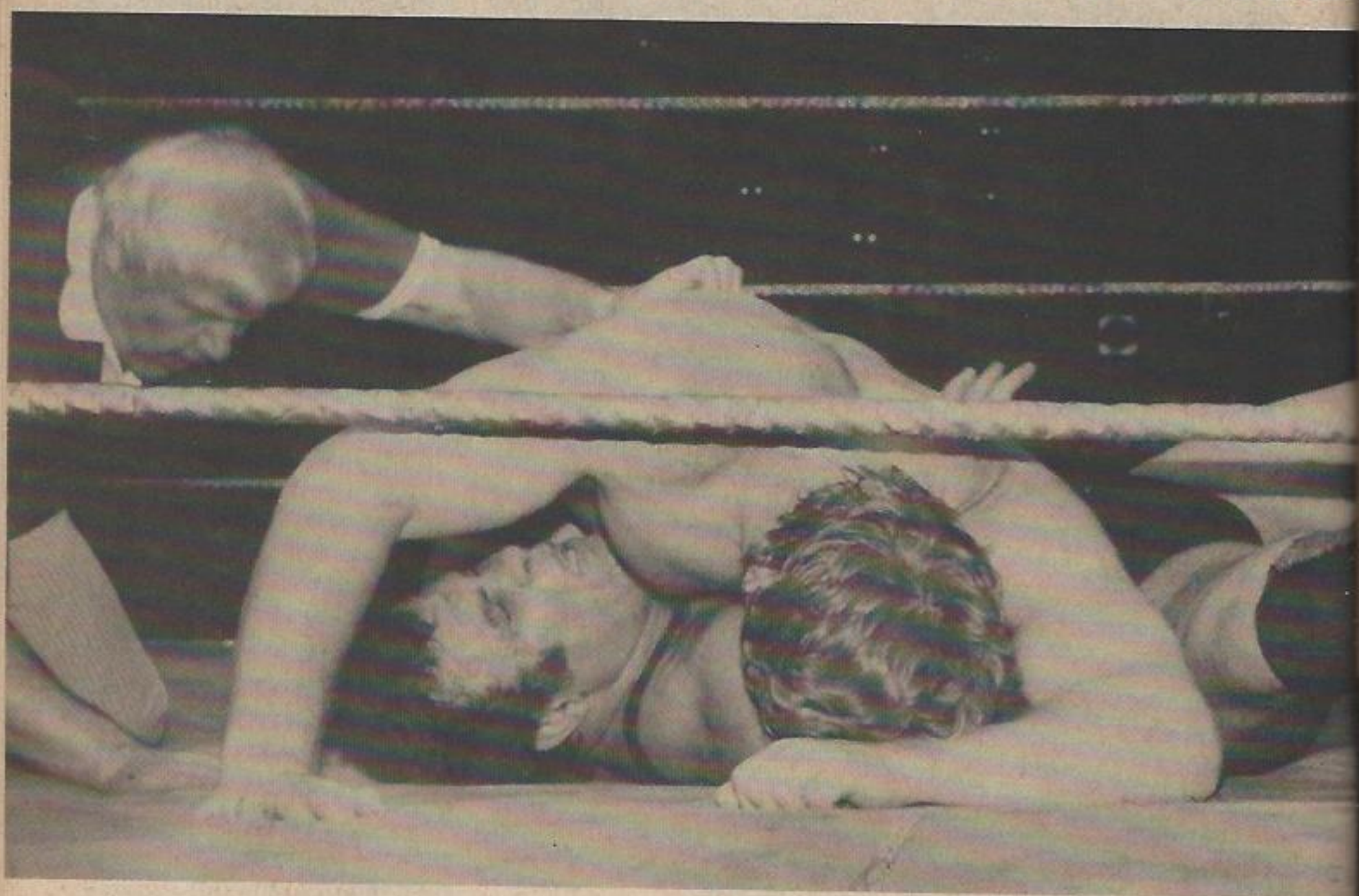
FARHOOD: So Bruno, you mean to say that you don't have any desire to regain that championship once more?

SAMMARTINO: Listen, Steve, there's something to be

(Continued on page 62)

Conclusive Evidence

HOW BOB BACKLUND'S TITLE IS SAVED BY THE



THE MAIL—and the accusations—have begun to pour in to this office. A random sampling:

"At Madison Square Garden, in the Texas Death Match between Bob Backlund and the Magnificent Muraco, Backlund once again proved that bribery is the only way he can win . . . The referee failed to see Muraco's foot on the rope during the count.

"I recall seeing Bob Backlund on the *Warner Wolf Show* several months ago . . . He stated that since becoming WWF champion, his salary has increased ninefold. Any wrestling fan in the New York area (especially the referee) can tell you how he has been spending his extra income."—Kelly Donovan, Rumson, NJ

Yet opinions differ, as

expressed by the following:

"The match was a Texas Death Match in which Bob Backlund pinned Magnificent Muraco. Now Muraco had his foot on the bottom rope to stop the count. Muraco argued, but he forgot it was a Texas Death Match and anything goes."—Allan Meltzer, Bellmore, NY

Now, does "anything goes" mean that even the most

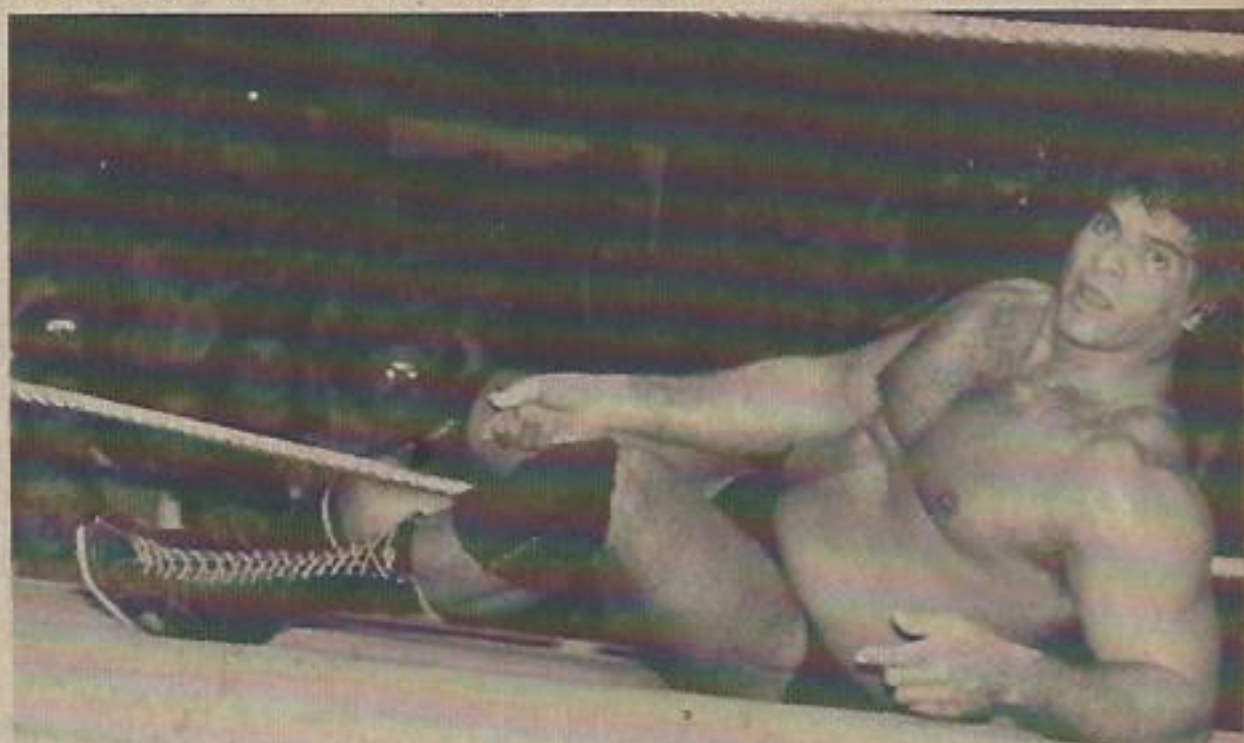
PHOTOS BY BILL APTER & STU SAKS

For years, accusations have been made and charges have been leveled against WWF champion Bob Backlund. Cheat! Payoff! Biased referees! Unfortunately for Backlund, photographs do not lie. The evidence exists, but is Backlund to be held responsible for the actions of the referees?

REFEREES



Pictured are three instances in which the referee did not spot Bob Backlund's opponent's foot draped across the bottom rope. Left: Backlund retains his title against King Kong Mosca. Above: Backlund wins the WWF title from Superstar Graham in 1978. Below: Magnificent Muraco is in stunned disbelief with his foot still on the rope.



rudimentary rules of the sport are suspended as well? In her letter to Don Muraco, Khanh Vu of Jersey City, New Jersey, does not seem to think so:

"I was very disappointed and upset when the referee gave back the title to Backlund. I saw you put your leg on the rope, but damn the referee . . . he's blind, and he gave Backlund the title."

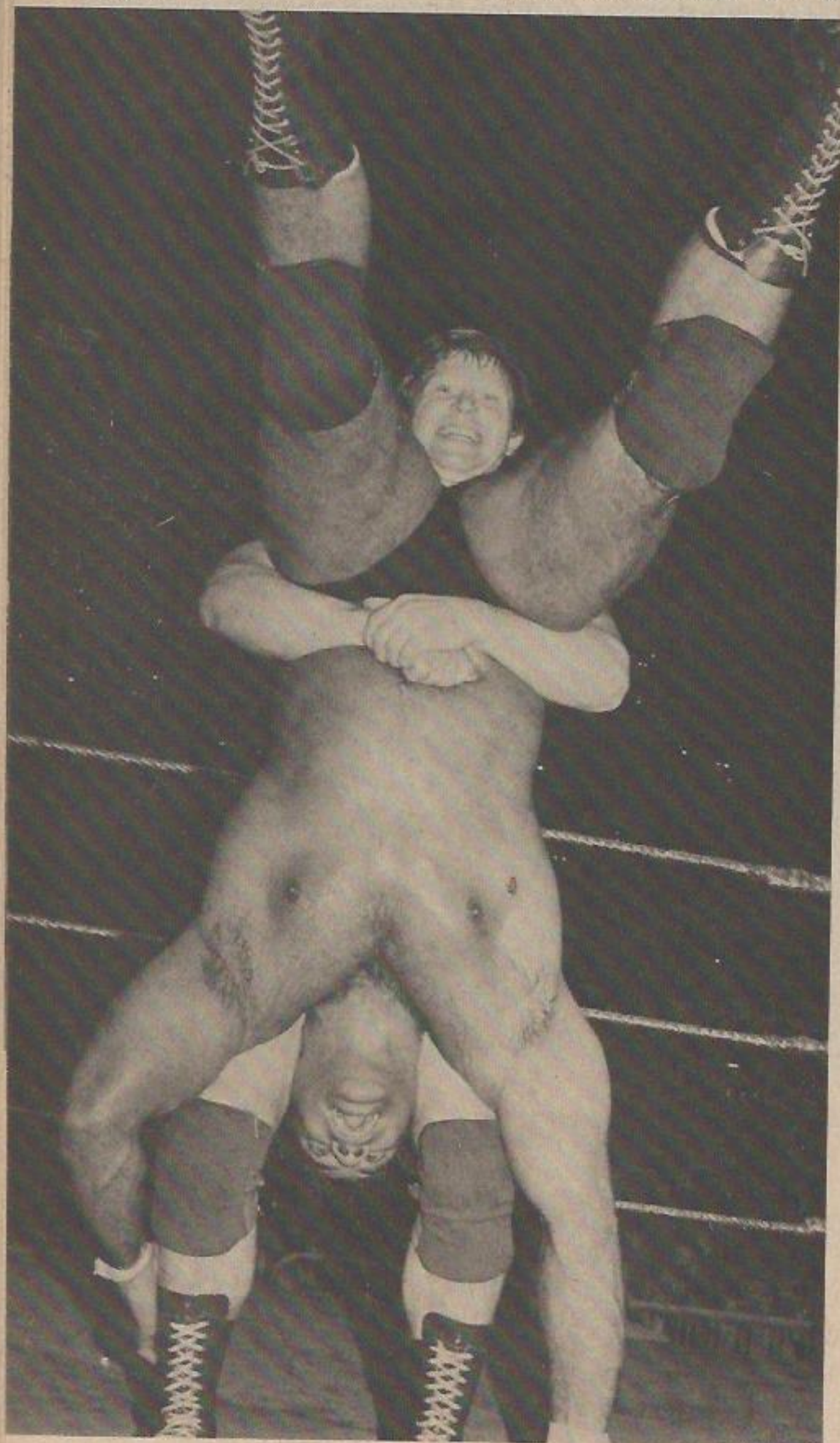
Jostled into action by these,

and dozens of letters like them, *Pro Wrestling Illustrated's* crack investigative reporting team decided to look into the matter. The evidence that was uncovered was both startling and undeniable: time and again, Bob Backlund has had his title saved through "selectively negligent" action on the part of the referees involved in the match. Let's review the facts.

The date is February 20, 1978. The place: New York's Madison Square Garden. Reigning WWF champion Superstar Graham is slated to defend his title against Bob Backlund. He will not succeed. Backlund will be awarded the title, despite the fact that Graham's foot is resting on the rope as the referee makes the count.

Slightly more than three years

Backlund executes a piledriver on Muraco. There is some question over whether or not this dangerous move is legal in the WWF. Many wrestlers have had their necks broken from the impact of the maneuver, and Federation officials have planned a rules interpretation meeting to decide its fate.



later, in the same arena, Bob Backlund defends his title against King Kong Mosca. Pat Patterson acts as special referee in the match. Once again, a packed house looks on as

Backlund retains his title, regardless of the fact that Mosca's foot is on the ropes during the count.

Now, a title defense against Magnificent Muraco hot on the heels of their one-hour time limit draw match, stirs up the same controversy. Fans at ringside and up towards the rafters screamed. The next day, they began sending letters. All had seen the same thing occur once again: Muraco's foot had been resting on the ropes.

These are but three instances in a repeating pattern that has developed since Backlund gained the title. In some cases, only verbal evidence from observers at the scene exists. In many other cases, clear photographic confirmation exists. In all cases, Backlund's title becomes suspect.

Pro Wrestling Illustrated went straight to the top: the offices of the World Wrestling Federation and its president, Hisashi Shinma.

"I can appreciate the position that men like Mr. Muraco, Mr. Graham, and Mr. Mosca are in," said Shinma. "It is unfortunate that things like this occur in what should otherwise be an honorable, sportsmanlike institution of man-to-man competition. Yet the rules of the World Wrestling Federation are quite clear: once a decision is made by a referee, there is nothing that can change it.

"Consider the case of Mr. Backlund gaining the title from Mr. Graham," continued Shinma. "Even if a photographer had an instant camera and came to us immediately after the match, say that evening, with a photo of Mr. Graham's foot on the rope, we still are not able to reverse the decision. It is like being in a baseball game: the decision of the umpire is final and absolute. It is the same here

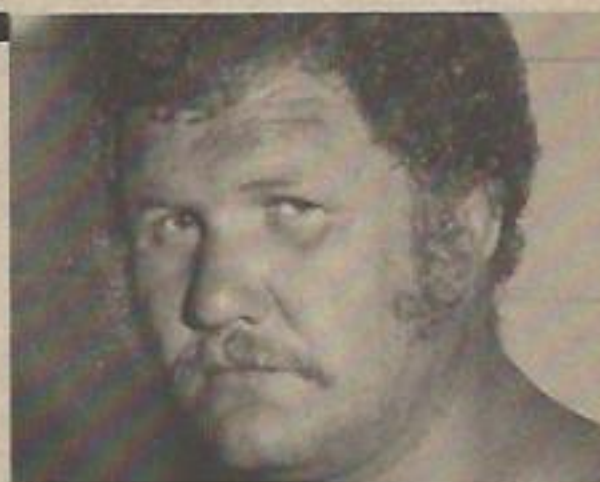
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WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

Every month, our reporters will compile wrestlers' most revealing quotes. Often catching the grapplers with their guards down, our reporters will work endlessly in obtaining interesting quotes on a variety of subjects

HARLEY RACE

"Look, just because a few damn brothers are slowing down my progress towards destroying Lou Thesz's record doesn't mean that they'll be successful. The days of the Von Erich brothers are numbered, and I'll move on to the title, to a seventh championship and a spot at the top of the record books."



CAPTAIN LOU ALBANO

"I'm telling you right now, babies, and all you gotta do is listen to the ol' Captain when he says that before you know it, these guys Garea and Martel will be out of the championship so fast their stupid little heads will be swimming, because the masters, the absolute best today, are none other than Mr. Fuji and Mr. Saito, and they're going all the way, and you can take that to the bank!"



MAGNIFICENT MURACO

"That slimy weasel Backlund thinks he's the champion, but everybody knows that I deserved to win my rematch with him. The most basic rule in wrestling is that when a wrestler's foot is on the rope, the hold must be broken. Instead of breaking Backlund's hold, the referee counted me out. Sounds a little bit less than ethical to me, if you know what I mean."

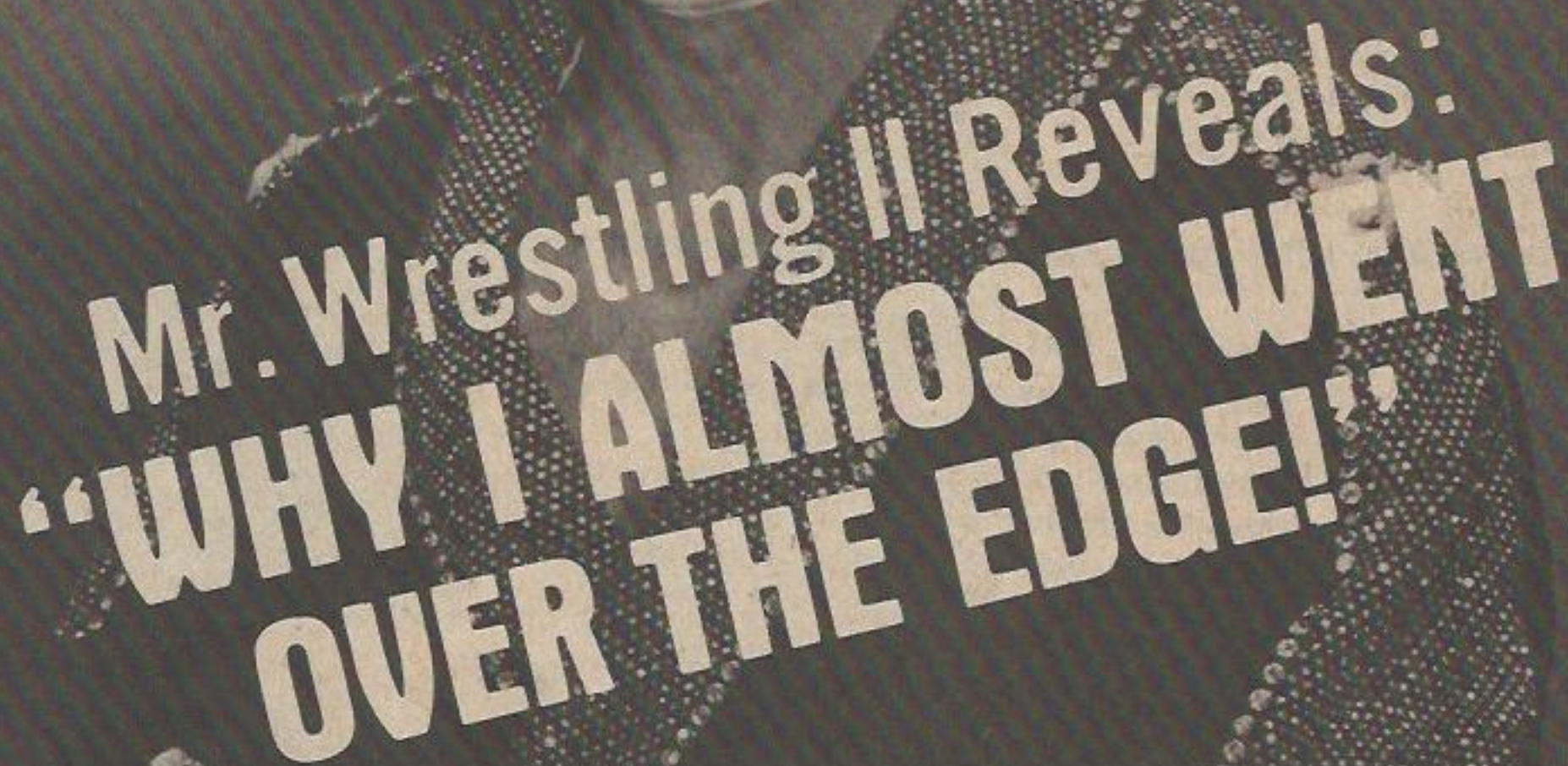


LARRY ZBYSZKO

"I think it's great. I haven't even set foot into the ring yet, and already that spaghetti-bender Sammartino is running away into retirement. Well, pretty soon Backlund will be doing the same thing, running away, and for good reason. I can't really blame him. When Backlund runs from me, at least he's showing some brains."

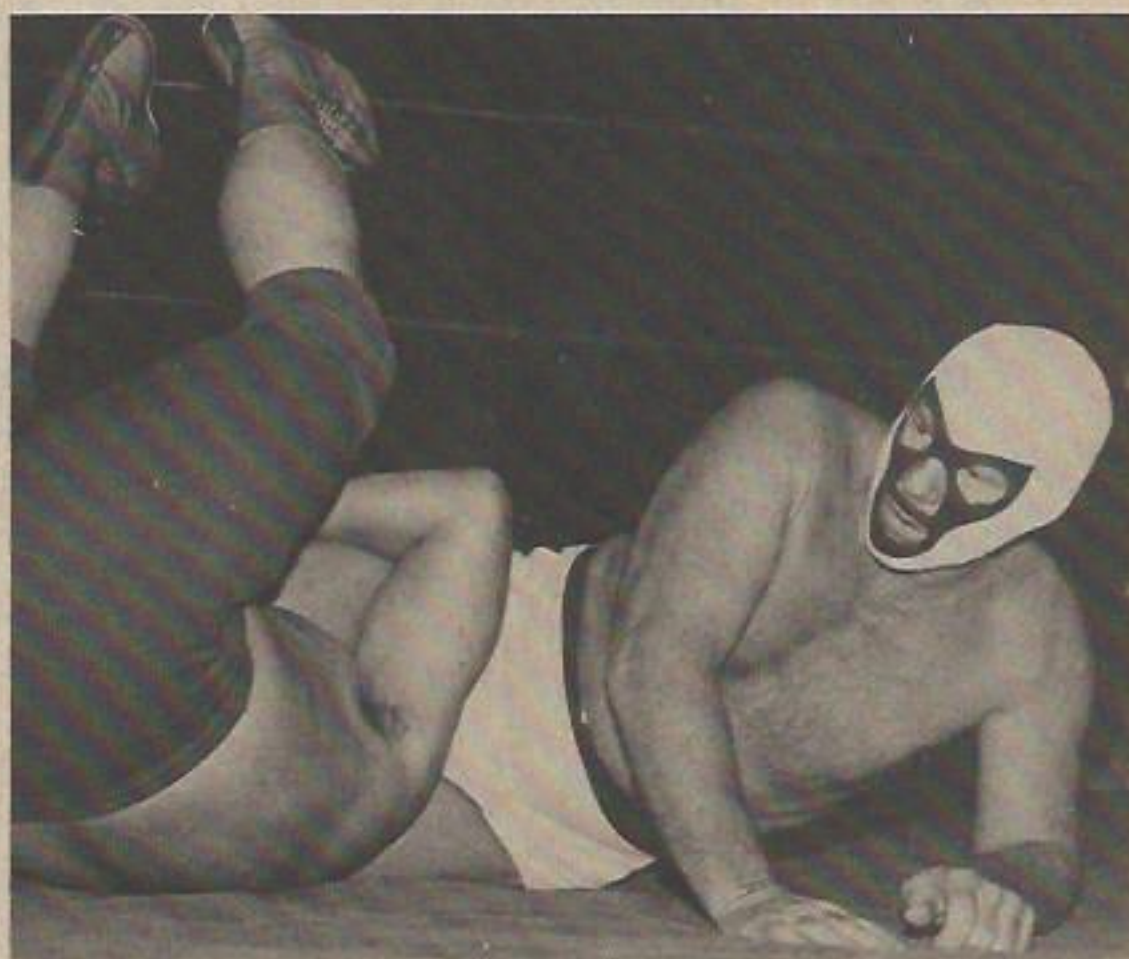
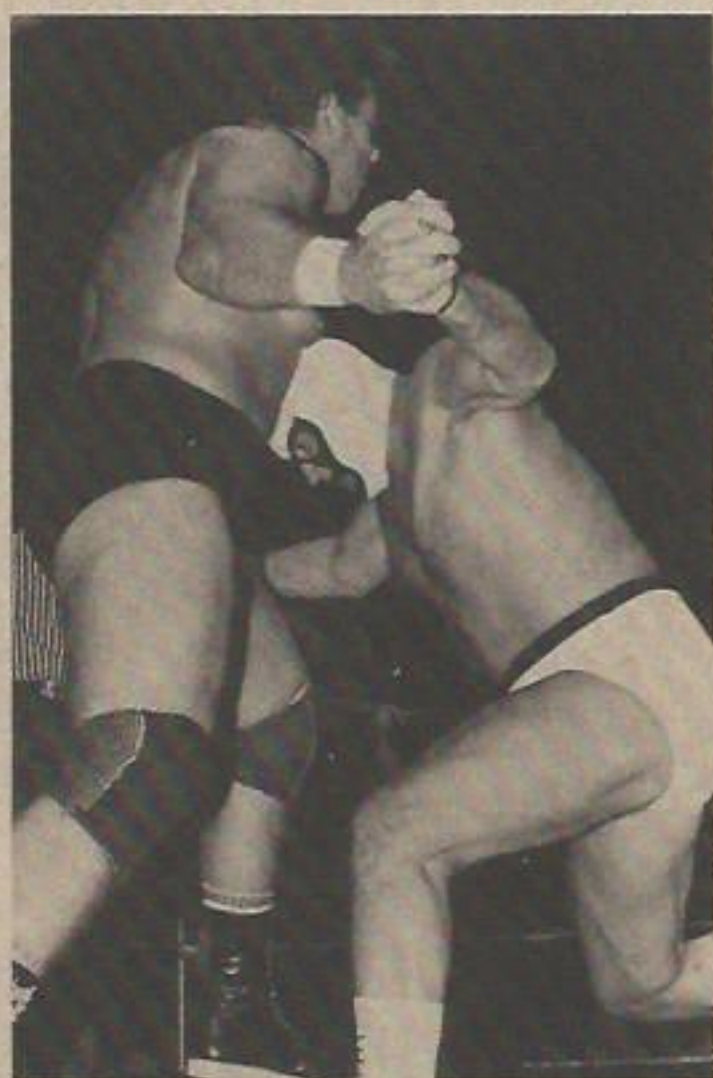


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A black and white photograph of a man wearing a wrestling mask and a dark, patterned suit. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. His right hand is clenched into a fist, and his left hand is partially visible at the bottom of the frame. The background is dark and textured.

Mr. Wrestling II Reveals:
**“WHY I ALMOST WENT
OVER THE EDGE!”**

It was a change that shocked many fans and wrestlers alike: Mr. Wrestling II was turning bad. But had he really? Or was it all part of an intricate plan designed to test the strength of the wills of such men as Tommy Rich and Kevin Von Erich?



Mr. Wrestling II engages Mike Sharpe in a test of strength (left), traps Mr. Sonada in a headscissors (above), and catapults himself toward John Studd (below).

By Mr. Wrestling II

THE TIME HAS come for me to clear the air. Everywhere I go, everywhere I turn, people are asking me what's wrong. It seems as if everybody feels that something inside of me has snapped. They think I've changed in some way, that maybe I've gone over the edge. Well have it your way, folks. I'm here to explain *why* I almost went over the edge.

All too often, people think that someone has made a drastic reversal in his personality when simply another dimension of his attitude has been revealed. I think this is exactly the mistake that people made with me when they decided that I had changed my ways.

Do you know why people came to this conclusion? It's all because of that "Most Popular Wrestler"



contest in Georgia. When I appeared on television and was asked about that award, I answered honestly: of course I wanted that award. Sure, it would look nice on my mantelpiece. And maybe . . . just maybe . . . I would be able to swing a few votes my way by talking myself up a bit.

Is it a shame for a man to say what he feels? This is a basic question I put to everyone reading this right now: is that so much of a shame? I don't deny that I would like to win an award. I would be proud of myself if I did, and I'm not ashamed to admit that to anyone.

Furthermore, I ask you this: does verbal aggression necessarily mean physical aggression as well? In other words, just because I talk tough, does that mean I've turned bad? If speaking with conviction and determination are the

(Continued on page 66)

**Ric Flair
vs. Harley Race**



**THE PRICE OF
BEING CHAMPION
IS BLOOD**

PHOTOS BY
BILL APTER

DOCTORS SCRAMBLED TO close the wounds before too much blood was lost. At once, cleansing alcohol was brought in to swab the gash on his forehead and prevent infection. Fortunately, stitches were not necessary, but given a slightly more serious cut, they well might have been.

As more and more medical gauze was brought in to cover the wound, the bandages used to initially cover the head were discarded. Soaked in blood, they offered silent testimony to the carnage that had occurred scant minutes ago.

This grisly scene was repeated not once, but twice, as a drop for drop exchange of bloodshed marked Ric Flair's first NWA title defense against former six-time champion Harley Race.

"I've never seen anything like it," screamed one ringside observer. "Look at this boy Flair go! No sooner does he get the title and he's out defending it with more ferocious anger and berserk determination than Rhodes was able to pull together during the entire course of his championship reign!"

While the comparison to Rhodes may be exaggerated, the basic emotions at work here are strikingly apparent. Flair is indeed approaching his title defense with enough energy to single-handedly win a Battle Royal, and it is not surprising that his

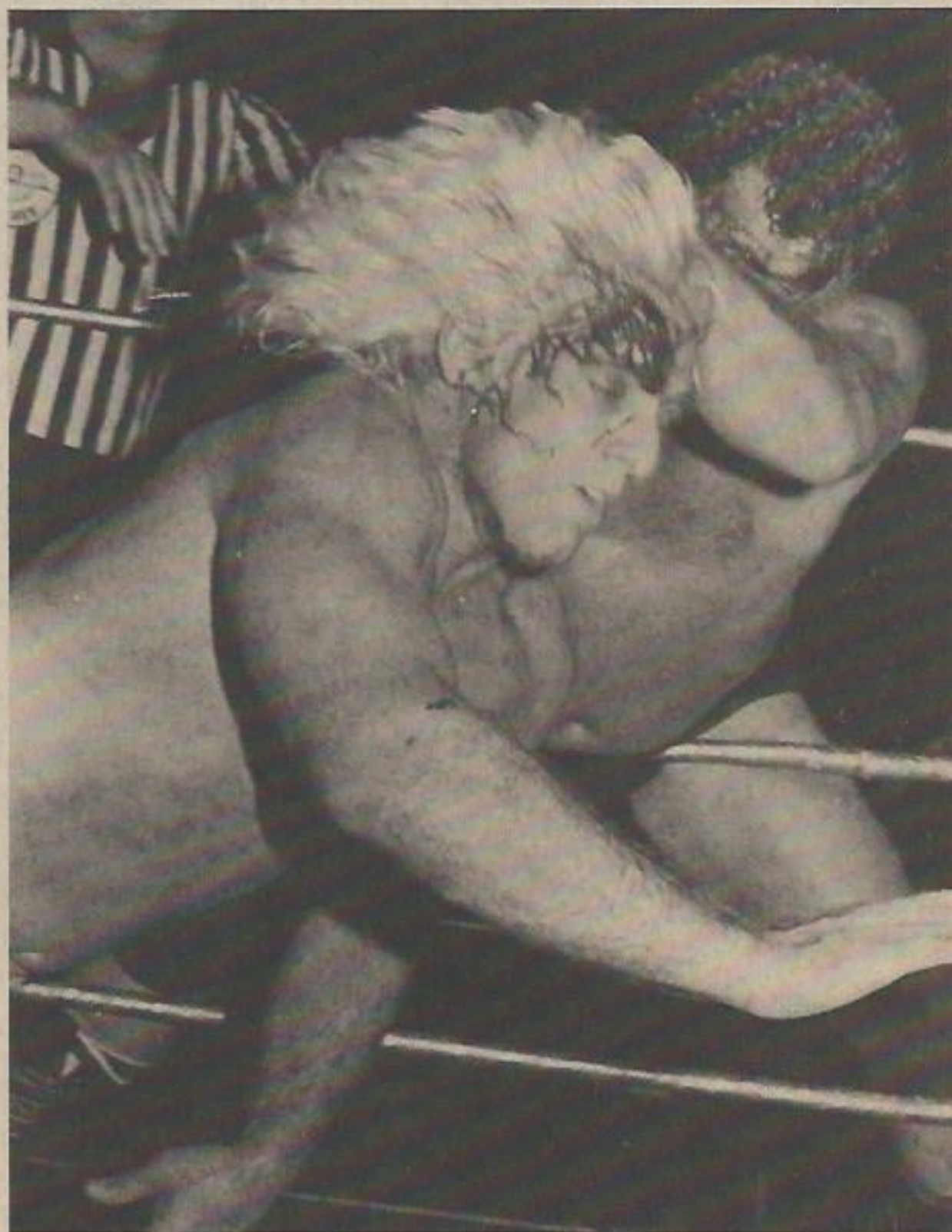
opponents are fighting fire with fire . . . or in this case, blood with blood.

It was only a few days after Flair won the title from Rhodes in Kansas City, Missouri, that he found himself defending his new crown against Harley Race in Des Moines, Iowa . . . Ric Flair's first title defense. It

would set the pace for a series of early title defenses that have been earmarked by similar brutality and violence.

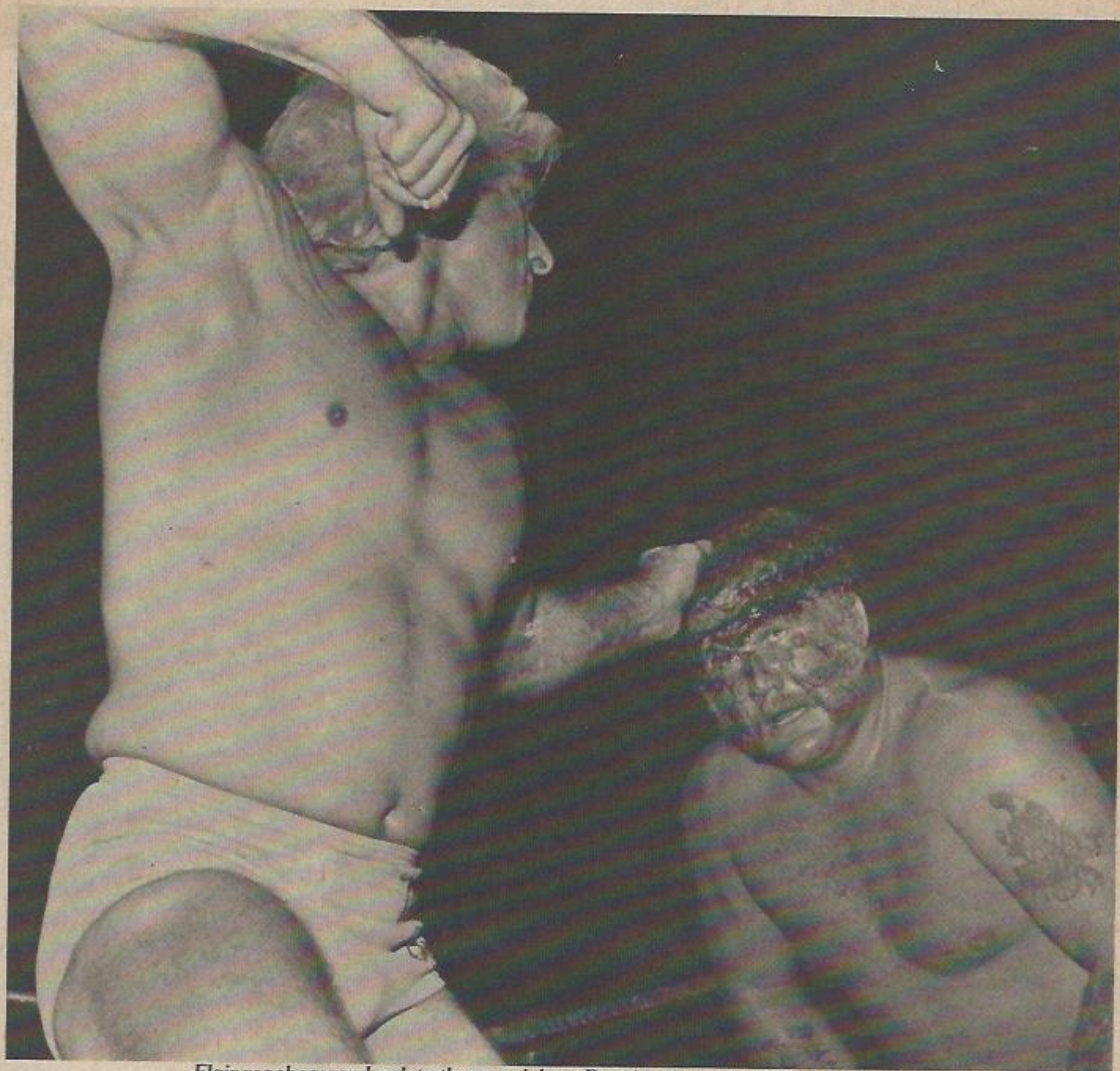
Prior to his first match as NWA champion, Ric Flair confessed some uneasiness about his new position.

"It's a strange thing, being champion," Flair said. "I've



Harley Race, who knows what sacrifices an NWA champion must make, reaches outside the ropes to punish current champion Ric Flair. Even Race admits that Ric is more than willing to pay the price.

Ric Flair's first title defense as NWA champion took place against Harley Race. It was a match that Flair was geared up for . . . so much so, that what should have been a relatively calm title match transformed into an excruciatingly berserk bloodbath



Flair reaches way back to throw a right at Race's exposed and already bleeding face. Ric claims to be prepared to wrestle at this bristling pace night after night against the world's top competition.

held other titles, of course, the biggest being the U.S. championship. There's something different about the NWA title, though. It's a more demanding position, much more than the U.S. title. I guess you could call it something like the difference between being president and senator... as U.S. champ, I was like a senator. Now I'm president, and there's a whole new batch of responsibilities to be taken care of.

"I must admit, I'm a little nervous about this match tonight," Flair continued, "because now, I'm going to have to wrestle each match as if it were my last... because it very well may be. I'm going to be facing some of the most determined men in the sport. Take Harley Race, for instance. He's going to be my first match as champion tonight. Now, if anyone is more hungry for the title, I sure don't know about it. Harley is going

after a record-breaking seventh time as titleholder. It's something that would set him apart from any man that has ever wrestled before... even apart from the legendary Lou Thesz! Harley wants the title, and that's all there is to it. He's hungry, and I'm going to have to give it my all out there if I want to hold on to this honor for more than a week!"

As the bell sounded marking the beginning of the

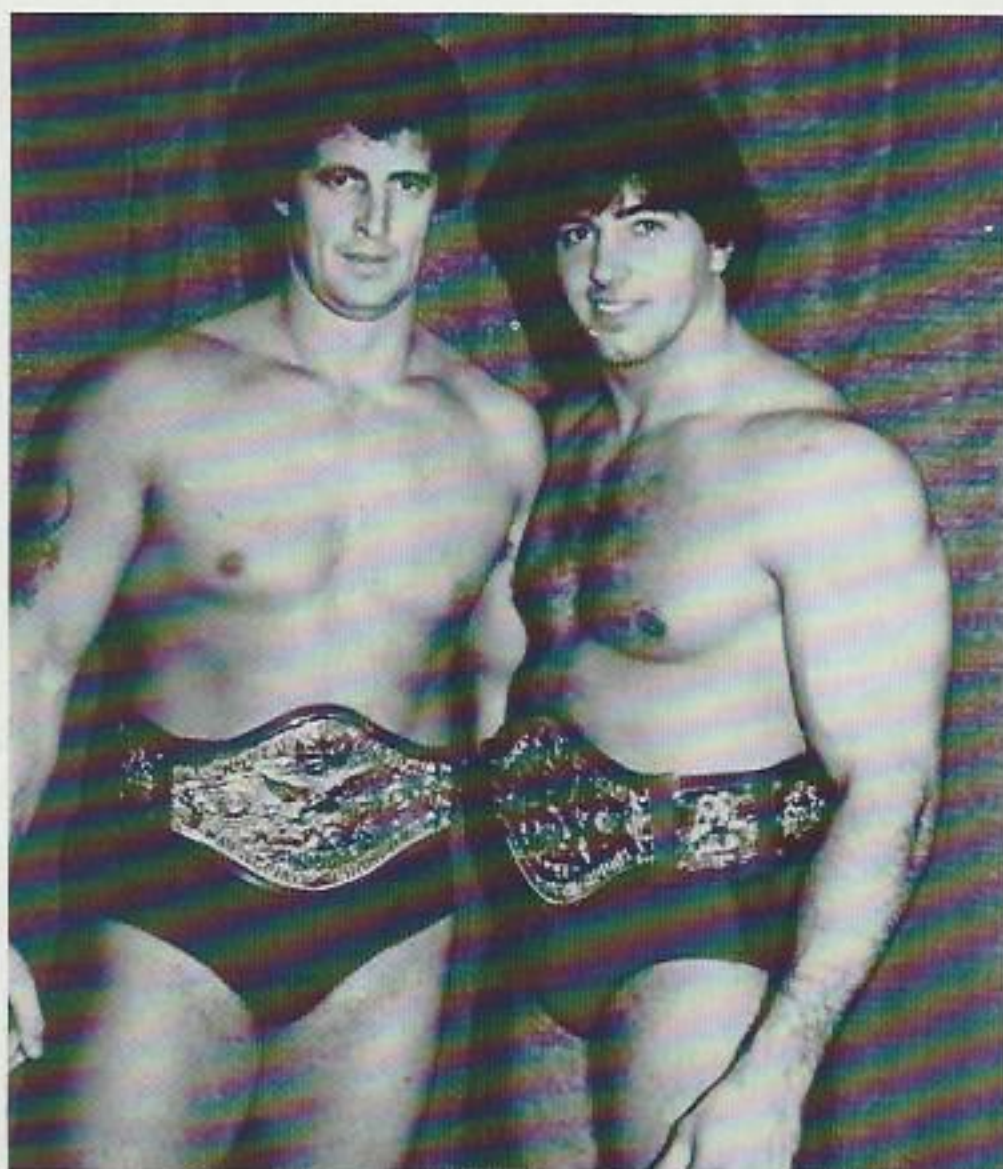
(Continued on page 65)

PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED

TV SPORTS

CLOSE-UP

TONY GAREA & RICK MARTEL



TONY GAREA AND Rick Martel are a class duo. They combine graceful aerial maneuvers with brute strength... Garea has held the WWF tag team title several times before with such great partners as Haystacks Calhoun, Larry Zbyszko, and Dean Ho... Martel, who used to prefer only singles bouts, uses a style that complements Garea's perfectly... Fans have voted them as two of the sport's sexiest men... They are two-time WWF champions, unseating both The Samoans and The Moondogs... Garea is from Auckland, New Zealand, and Martel is from Montreal, Canada... As a youngster, Martel idolized the great French

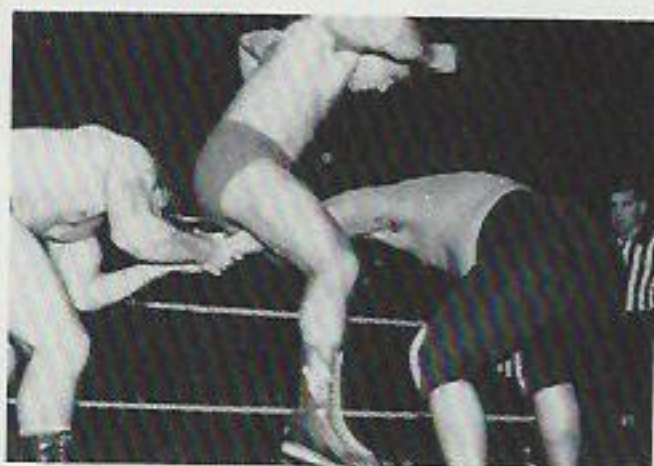
Canadian champion, Edouard Carpentier... Garea's hometown hero was former NWA champion Pat O'Connor... They spent endless hours in the gymnasium working out new tag team routines... Both of them would like to see Captain Lou Albano banned from the sport... Both have aspirations to win major individual titles sometime in the future... Their immediate goal is to wrestle both the AWA and NWA tag team champions and reign supreme over the entire wrestling world... Both men love their fans and spend endless amounts of time doing charity work. □

PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED

CLOSE-UP

FAVORITE MANEUVER

"Any maneuver in which we can utilize our speed, agility, and teamwork is at the same time most effective and most satisfying," says Rick Martel. "Tony and I are so well-suited in the ring. We always know what the other is thinking and can take advantage of that with our physical compatibility."



TOUGHEST OPPONENT

"The Samoans," replies Rick Martel. "Those two . . . savages . . . were about as fierce as they come. I think something inside Albano snapped when he was training those beasts, because they definitely came out of left field. But we did beat them to win the belts the first time, so that was a positive boost. I'm glad they're gone, though."

GREATEST MATCH

"That's pretty easy," maintains Tony Garea. "Without a doubt it would have to be when Rick and I regained our WWF tag team belts from The Moondogs. As Rick can tell you, they were a tough pair of wrestlers, wherever they came from! It was very satisfying to get our belts back from them."



MOST HATED

"Well, when you get right down to it," explains Tony Garea, "I would have to say that we both hate Mr. Saito, Mr. Fuji, and that maniac Albano most of all. Fuji and Saito are creating chaos all through the WWF, and they really don't deserve to be where they are today. We know that they're after our belts, but it'll be a cold day in hell when they get them."

★★★★★Special Ballot★★★★★

VOTE FOR THE TOP WRESTLERS OF 1981!

IT'S TIME FOR you to make a decision. Actually, it's time for you to make **nine** decisions: the **Pro Wrestling Illustrated Fan Awards** for 1981 are being decided at this very minute, and your vote must be counted!

Nine important categories will boast a winner who will be afforded the honor of undisputed recipient of the **Pro Wrestling Illustrated Fan Award**. It's an important distinction, because the winners are decided by the fans themselves, and not a partial assemblage of biased reporters or professionals.

Read carefully the descriptions of the categories that follow. Take the utmost care in making your decision and casting your vote. Then quickly mail in your ballot.

Results will be reported in the March 1982 issue, on sale January 12.

Remember: **Every** vote counts. Be sure yours does, too, Mail in your ballot today.

THE CATEGORIES

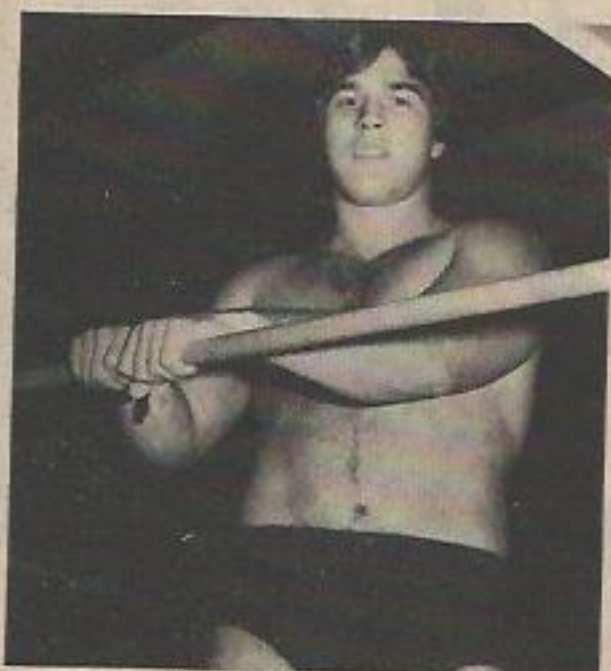
- **Most Popular Wrestler of the Year:** In past years, such men as Andre the Giant, Wahoo McDaniel, and Mil Mascaras have won this honor. The object here is not to reward success, but the manner in which success is pursued. A man who is a good sport, adheres to the rules, treats fans with respect, is polite to referees, and gives unselfishly to outside causes is a good candidate for this award.



1980's Most Popular Wrestler
Mr. Wrestling II

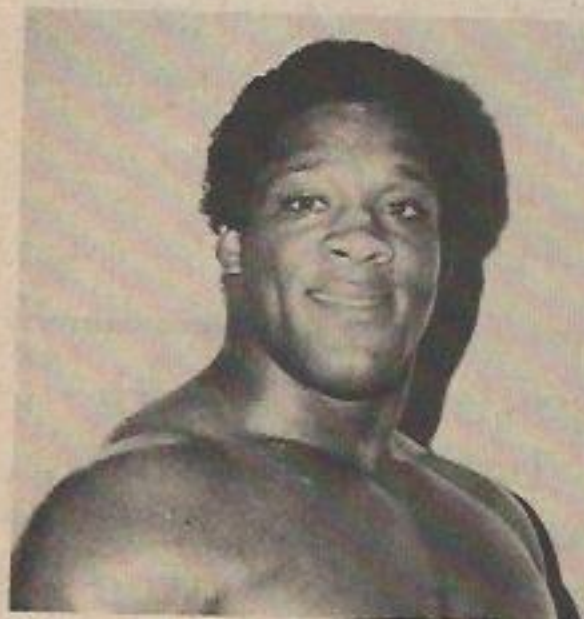
Once again, we seek the opinion of the foremost experts of wrestling—the fans. It is time to honor the top achievements of 1981 in our annual poll, and we call upon the experts—you—to vote in each of the nine important categories. Remember, every vote counts!

• **Rookie of the Year:** To qualify for this award, a wrestler must have started his career during the past year. Two criteria are considered: (1) The relative success the wrestler has had in the past year, and (2) The wrestler's potential for future success. Popularity is not a factor, but it's well known that a vote for rookie of the year may well be a vote for a future champion.

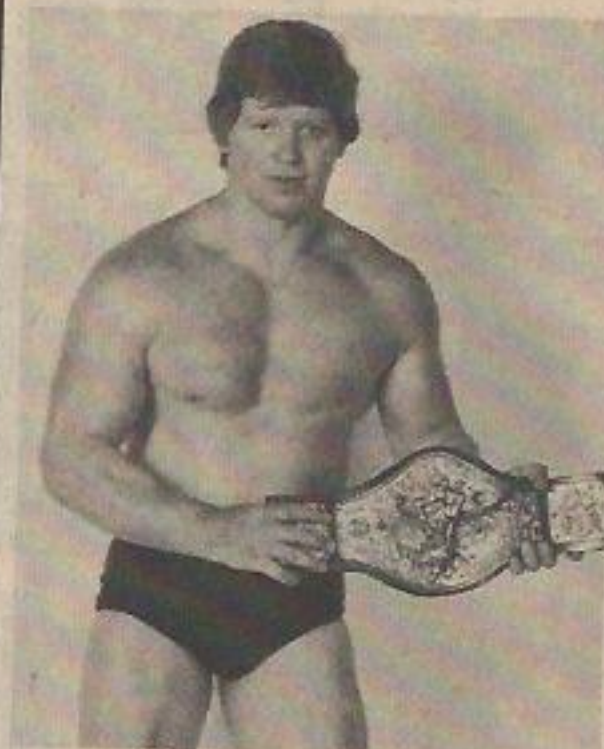


1980's Rookie of the Year
Terry Taylor

• **Most Improved Wrestler:** This is a category designed to honor that wrestler who has shown the most improvement in ability and style over the past 12 months. The candidate must be either a scientific wrestler or a rulebreaker. The final decision should take into account any success whatsoever, whether it is gaining title shots or advancing up the contender ladder.



1980's Most Improved Wrestler
Tony Atlas



1980's Wrestler of the Year
Bob Backlund

• **Wrestler of the Year:** What can we say? Probably the top honor of all. Talent is the pure criterion here. The Wrestler of the Year must reflect greatness in achievement, ability, and contribution to the sport. Yes, rulebreakers may apply. Quality of opponents counts heavily as well.



1980's Tag Team of the Year
Jimmy Snuka & Ray Stevens

• **Tag Team of the Year:** Once again, success is the ultimate criterion here. Good or bad, the top tag team must be that rare combination of wrestlers who have shown experience and skill in the ring. The trend in the past seems to be that rulebreakers have dominated the balloting, but it's up to you fans to decide whether that trend will continue this year.

• **Match of the Year:** A title change. A match that might have ended a superstar's career. A brilliant scientific encounter. The Match of the Year must be the most important and thrilling event of the year. It had to have taken place in a major arena before 5,000 fans or more. It doesn't necessarily have to be a title change, but the match must reflect the grace, power, and brilliance of this great sport.

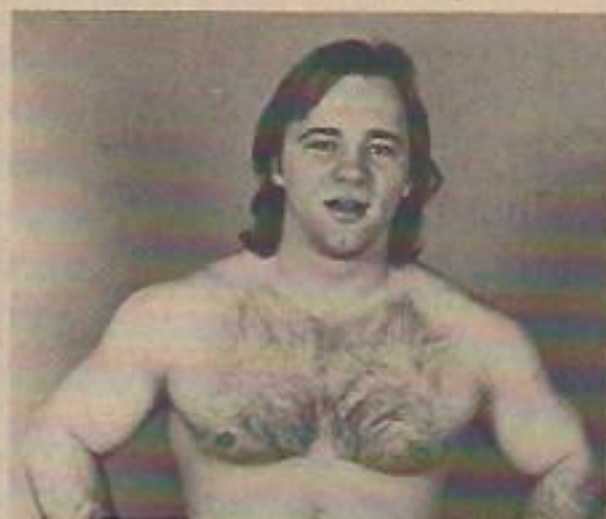


1980's Match of the Year
Bruno Sammartino vs. Larry Zbyszko

• **Inspirational Wrestler of the Year:** This category bestows acclaim upon that man who has shown courage and tenacity in overcoming some obstacle, whether it is physical injury or the frustrations of psychological confusion. The winner in this category must have displayed his rare courage for hundreds of other wrestlers and hundreds of thousands of wrestling fans.



1980's Inspirational Wrestler of the Year
Junkyard Dog



1980's Most Hated Wrestler
Larry Zbyszko

- **Most Hated Wrestler:** This is the category in which you may vent your anger against those wrestlers whom you feel to be particularly obnoxious, or those who disgust you thoroughly. Is there a man who enjoys breaking bones? Does a wrestler like to see pain reflected in the eyes of his opponents? Does he flaunt his rulebreaking and make a mockery of the very sport he is participating in? Then he's a good choice for this award.



1980's Manager of the Year
Sir Oliver Humperdink

- **Manager of the Year:** Things like integrity and fair play, you'll be surprised to learn, are unimportant in the selection of this award. The effect that a manager has on his wrestlers, both in terms of actual success and improved skills in the ring, must be considered. The manager of the year must be judged on the strategies he has formulated and the knowledge he has been able to pass on to his wrestlers. As well as a motivating taskmaster, the manager of the year must be an inspiration in and of himself. ☐

Official Fan Ballot



*Here are my votes
for the Best of 1981*



WRESTLER OF THE YEAR _____

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR _____

MATCH OF THE YEAR _____

MOST IMPROVED WRESTLER
OF THE YEAR _____

TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR _____

MOST HATED WRESTLER
OF THE YEAR _____

INSPIRATIONAL WRESTLER
OF THE YEAR _____

MANAGER OF THE YEAR _____

MOST POPULAR WRESTLER
OF THE YEAR _____

Send Ballot To:
"YEAR END VOTE"
c/o PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED
Box 48
ROCKVILLE CENTRE, N.Y. 11571

YOUR NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

WRESTLING ENQUIRER

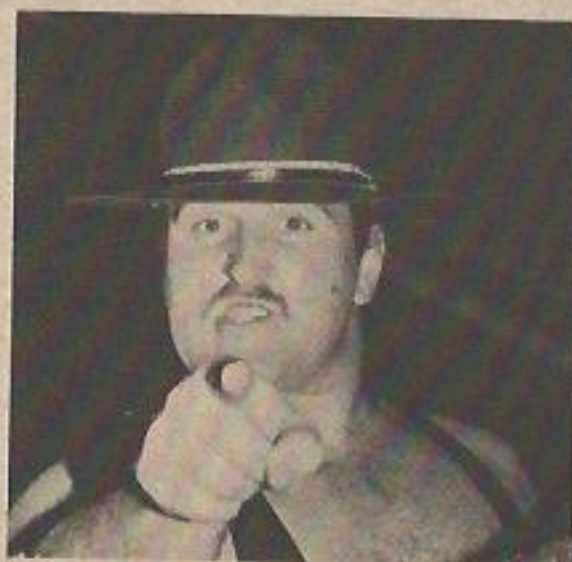
SGT. SLAUGHTER NEW U.S. KING Wins Over Injured Steamboat In Tourney

BY BILL APTER

CHARLOTTE, NC—In a tournament marred by disputes and injuries, Sgt. Slaughter emerged as the new U.S. champion.

The final match of this tournament saw Slaughter defeat the popular Rick Steamboat. Steamboat's leg had been injured earlier in a sneak-attack. Rick bravely tried to wrestle with the debilitating injury, but his mobility was badly hampered. Slaughter took advantage of the injury, mercilessly working on the injured limb.

After the match, Steamboat acknowledged that the injury required rest. Slaughter, meanwhile, is crowing that he will remain U.S. champion forever.



Sgt. Slaughter made his point when he defeated an injured Rick Steamboat to win the vacated U.S. title.

and can't wait to show a fully healed Steamboat that the victory was no fluke.

The title was vacated when an injury to then-champion Wahoo McDaniel made it impossible for Wahoo to wrestle.

Masked Superstar Banned From U.S. Arenas

BY STEVE FARHOOD

ATLANTA, GA—Masked Superstar has been temporarily suspended from professional wrestling in the United States. The term of his suspension is still to be decided.

The ban stems from an incident between Masked Superstar and NWA representative George Scott. During a television interview, Superstar threatened the official. Scott replied that any attack on a wrestling representative will ensure Masked Superstar will be banned from wrestling in U.S. arenas. Superstar proceeded to rough up the official, who subsequently



Banned from U.S. rings for attacking NWA official George Scott, Masked Superstar is campaigning in Japan.

made good on his promise.

Masked Superstar is currently wrestling in Japan. From there, he intends to fight his suspension.

Ex-Tag Champs Adonis & Ventura Go Solo— Together

BY CRAIG PETERS

WASHINGTON, DC—Ex-AWA tag team champions Adrian Adonis and Jesse Ventura are both negotiating to wrestle in the WWF, but not as a tag team. Instead, each man has chosen



Ex-AWA tag team champions Adrian Adonis and Jesse Ventura have come to the WWF to work as singles.

to wrestle alone. There is no official explanation for their decision, and there is no final word as to whether they will resume their tag team careers in the WWF.

There is speculation that a rift exists between the pair, but no one seems to know the cause or why both men would leave the AWA at the same time. The pair recently lost their AWA belts to Jim Brunzell and Greg Gagne.

New Career For Gagne Keeps Him Close To Wrestling



Former AWA heavyweight champion Verne Gagne lends his expert commentary to AWA television broadcasts.

BY STU SAKS

MINNEAPOLIS, MN—After nearly three decades of being one of wrestling's top stars, recently retired Verne Gagne has begun a new career as color commentator for AWA wrestling matches.

During the televised battles, Gagne analyzes the subtle nuances of the action. His insights explain to the viewer that the sport is far more complex than merely a test of strength.

As to why he chose to be a commentator, Verne said, "I found myself missing wrestling. I need to be around the sport. However, I didn't miss waking up in the morning and tending to bruises. You rarely get bruised being a commentator."

Verne should talk to WWF color commentator Pat Patterson about that.

Jaggers Refuses To Defend Southern Title

BY PETER KING

TAMPA, FL—After winning the Southern heavyweight championship, Bobby Jaggers has steadfastly refused to face any challengers.

Despite the fact that 138

wrestlers have formerly challenged him, Jaggers saw fit to accept only one challenger from a rookie. The match never occurred because the young man was in the hospital at the time, recovering from pneumonia. Jaggers won his only title defense by default.

Observers do not know why he refuses to defend his belt, but according to Jerry Brisco, "Jaggers knows whom he can successfully defeat. That category seems to be limited to hospitalized rookies."



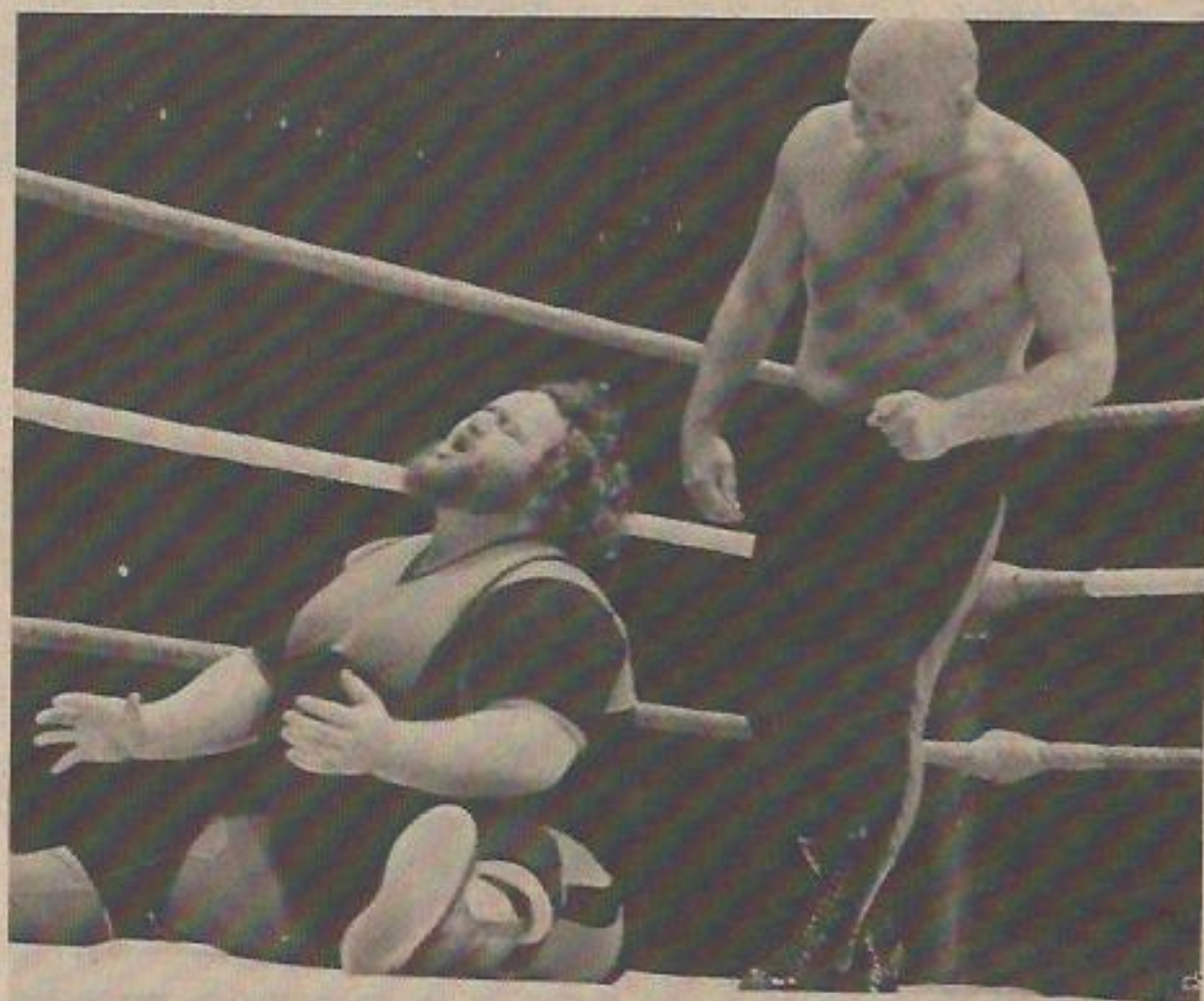
Bobby Jaggers has been a very inactive Southern heavyweight champion.

LOOKING AT...

Matt Brock:



I'LL TELL YOU, my friends, this holiday season is beginning to get to me. I no sooner get through Thanksgiving with my bank account just about intact (Farhood said he had some good tips for the turkey day contests . . . I swear, he's making kickback money somewhere), when Christmas is starting to breathe down my neck. Before you know it, New Year's Day will be here, and I'll lose another bundle on the bowl games.

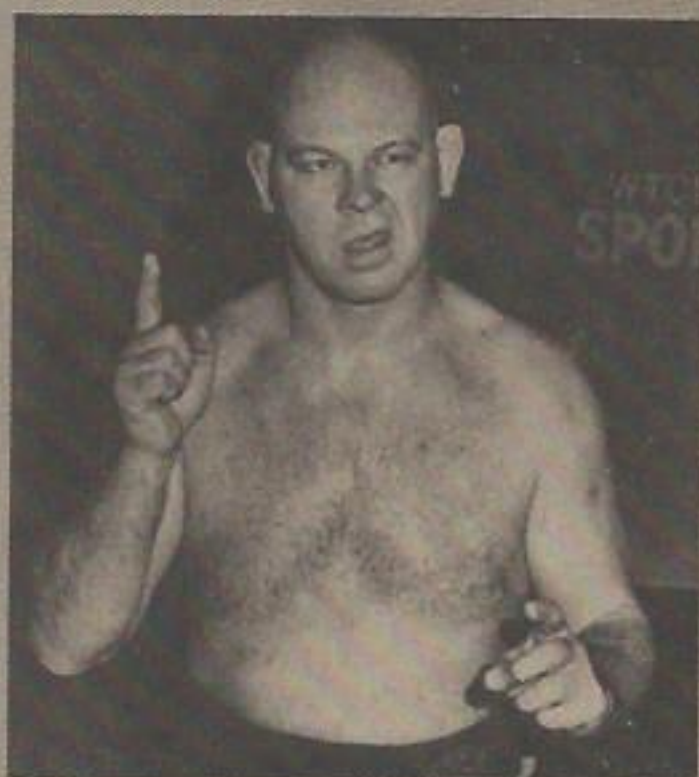


Baron Von Raschke has gone from being among the most despised to most beloved men in wrestling. The Baron squeezes the blood out of Dusty Rhodes' head with his dreaded Prussian Brain Claw (left) and works over Crusher Blackwell (above).

On top of all this upbeat sentiment, they tell me they want me to vent my spleen regarding one Baron Von Raschke. I'm not in a good mood to write favorably about him, but then he's never in a good mood when he steps into the ring, so I suppose we're even.

This guy Von Raschke has been around for a while. He's wrestled all the names: Bob Backlund, Harley Race, Nick Bockwinkel, even Bruno. No one can ever say he's suffered from lack of title shots. Lack of titles . . . well, that's another story altogether.

BARON VON RASCHKE



He's what you might call a "wily veteran." Part of the old school of wrestling, he maintains his ties with the old country, having imported his bread-and-butter maneuver, the Prussian Brain Claw, from his native land.

I don't like him.

Say what? "Come on, Matt," you're saying, "what are you telling us? Are you getting senile or something?" Okay, okay, so I realize that Von Raschke gets a lot of fan mail, I understand that a lot of you people admire him for what

he's doing about that Vachon incident. I just don't like him.

Mad Dog Vachon. Oh, you didn't hear? Well, what happened was that Crusher Blackwell and John Studd came along and decided to do a number on Mad Dog. Well, they took care of Vachon, all right, but they didn't bargain on the Baron coming through for his old friend in the clutch.

Before you know it, there's Von Raschke running roughshod all over the AWA, playing eight ball

with the heads of Blackwell and Studd.

Now, a lot of people think that the Baron is great because he's sticking up for his friend, because he's avenging a wrong perpetrated by Blackwell and Studd. Well, ol' Matt is telling you right now: two wrongs don't make a right.

Catchy phrase, huh?

Come on, folks, wake up. You think the Prussian Brain Claw is anything to look at and admire? How can you say that in one breath, and then turn around and damn Muraco for his Asiatic spike?

Okay, I'll grant that I never expected the Baron to be the type who would stick up for another man so strongly . . . but there has got to be an ulterior motive here somewhere. I'm just not sure where to look, and I really don't care. Just thinking about this guy has shot me out of my holiday mood so fast that I may very well gain a new reputation as the Scrooge of the Year, 1981.

Look, Farhood, only you have the power to pull me out of this slump. I'd better get some good tips for the bowls, or else you'll be "On Assignment" in Mongolia interviewing Killer Khan's grandmother!

Happy New Year!

□



Matt Brock simply does not trust Von Raschke. He has seen him try to maim good men like Tony Atlas too many times before to believe he's now turned good.

KEN PATERA- MAN ON THE RUN... FROM HIMSELF

By Dr. Peter Lobaró, PhD, PC

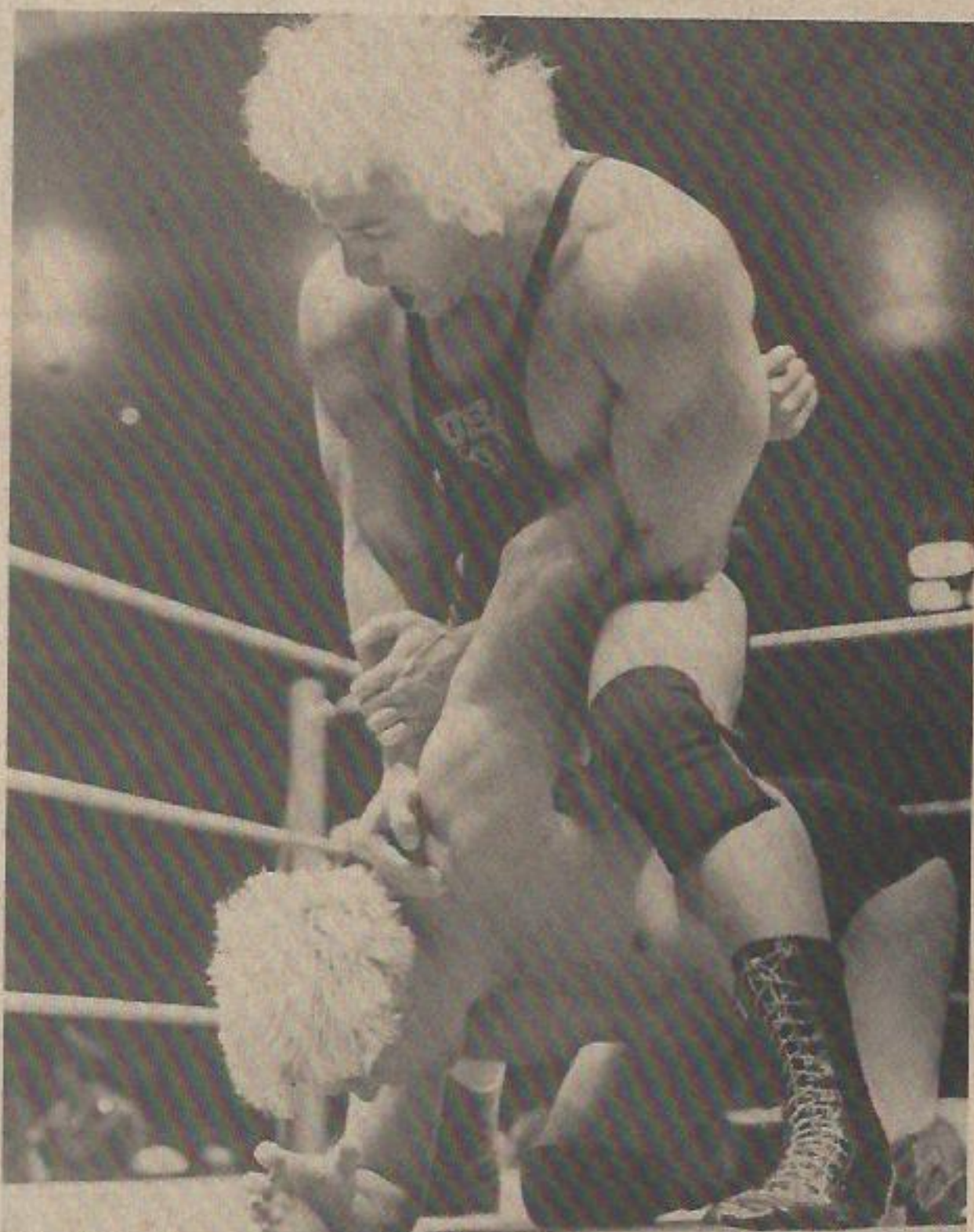
I WOULD FIRST like to thank the editors of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* for giving me this opportunity to express some ideas and opinions that I have been working on for some time. Being an ardent fan of wrestling, I have fused this interest with my professional calling as a psychologist and have come up with what I feel to be some interesting theories regarding wrestlers in general, and some individual wrestlers in particular.

In this brief article, I would like to address myself to one particular individual: Ken Patera. I have been following his efforts over the past months with great interest. I find that psychologically, Mr. Patera is a fascinating individual.

Unfortunately, he also seems to be somewhat confused about who he is and where he intends to bring himself regarding his professional wrestling career.

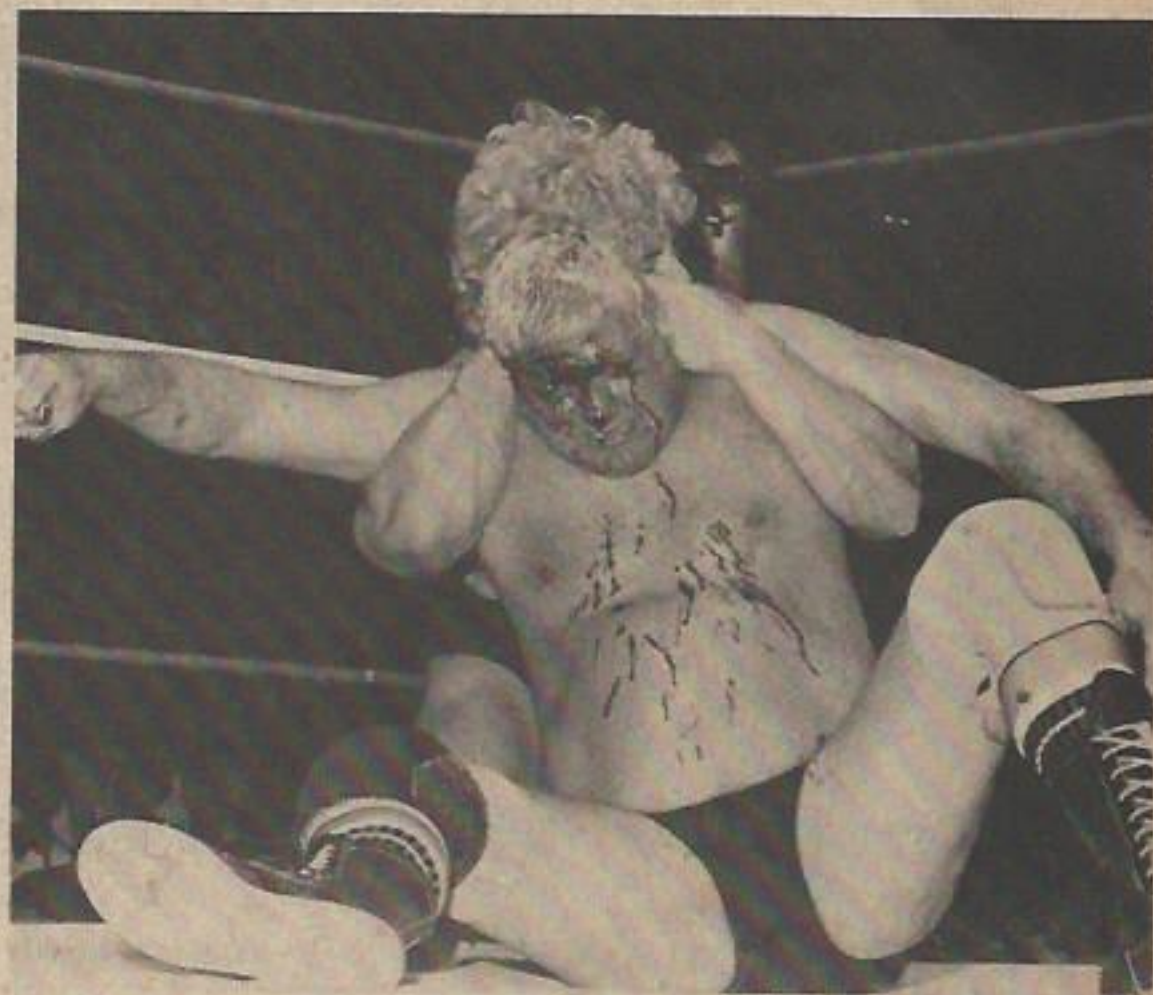
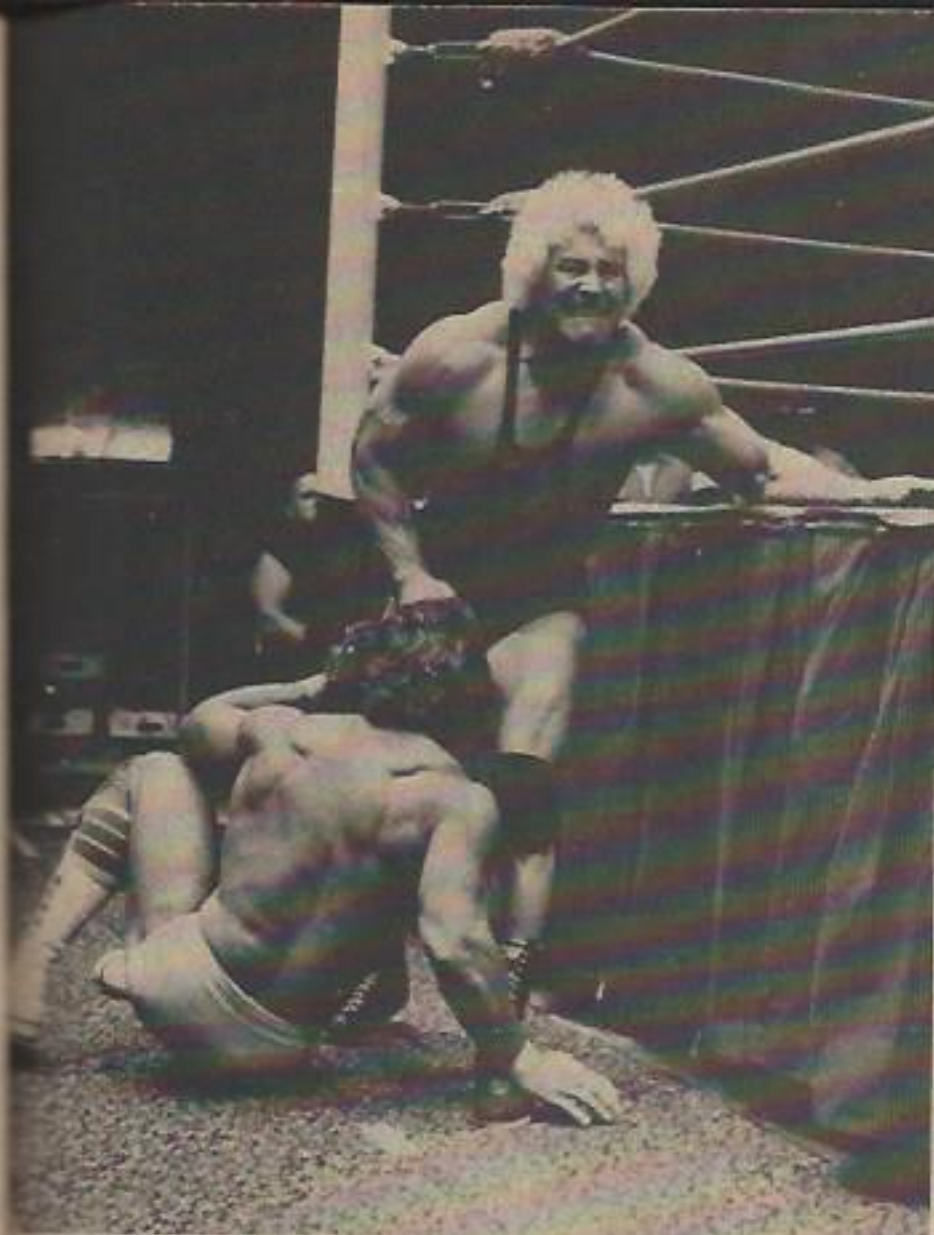
Let's take a quick look at Mr. Patera's case history.

In the mid-'70s, Ken Patera began his professional career wrestling in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Soon thereafter, he



Ken Patera's travels brought him to New York, where he quickly became embroiled in a feud with Pat Patterson.

Why does Ken Patera continually work his way into a territory, establish himself, and then inexplicably move on at precisely the time when he should be attaining total mastery of that very territory? A noted psychologist examines Patera's recent actions and offers his analysis



Patera grabs a handful of Kerry Von Erich's hair in St. Louis (left). Down in New Orleans, Patera lowers a bloody Dick Murdoch to the canvas after executing his swinging neckbreaker (above). And in Japan, Ken lowers the boom on Baba the Giant (bottom).

made a move to Texas. Unusual, because they are two diametrically opposing areas of the country, as different from each other as Maine is from California.

Before you know it, though, he is out of Texas and back up north, in Chicago. Now if he had made a move from Minneapolis to Chicago, that would be somewhat more understandable.

But the fact that he see-saws back and forth between the North and the South in this way demonstrates a marked tendency for uncertainty. Indeed, when he returns north, he does not go back to Minneapolis, but rather to an area slightly different in nature. This indicates that after going to Texas he felt he needed to return to what he had left in the first place, but that he also wanted something slightly different as well.

From Chicago he moves to the Carolinas, then touring the entire East Coast, only to return to a base in the Carolinas once more. Again, I analyze not only uncertainty, but a distinct conflict between the extra-curricular tendencies in this man.

At first he wants to stay in the Carolinas, maintain roots, settle down for a while. Then, he decides to travel: north and south along the coastline. Again, the turnaround: another decision to stay rooted in the Carolinas. He does not know

whether to travel or to establish a firm connection in one place.

Then back to Texas, yet another search for some of the glory and security of his early years in wrestling. From Texas he moves to Atlanta where he spends an extended period of time, wins the Georgia title, and then vacates it of his own free will. At the time he cited "no competition" as the reason for his abandonment of the title, but I feel that the reason for this action run much, much deeper than that.

From Atlanta back to Texas yet again, and now to his original stomping ground of Minneapolis.

Look at this man: he starts in one area, moves away, maintains roots, tears them up and travels, stops again to settle down, travels once more to an area far away, returns back to his original area, leaves again, returns again. These are clearly not the actions of a stable personality.

After a careful analysis of the case history of Ken Patera and some off-the-record discussion
(Continued from Page 67)

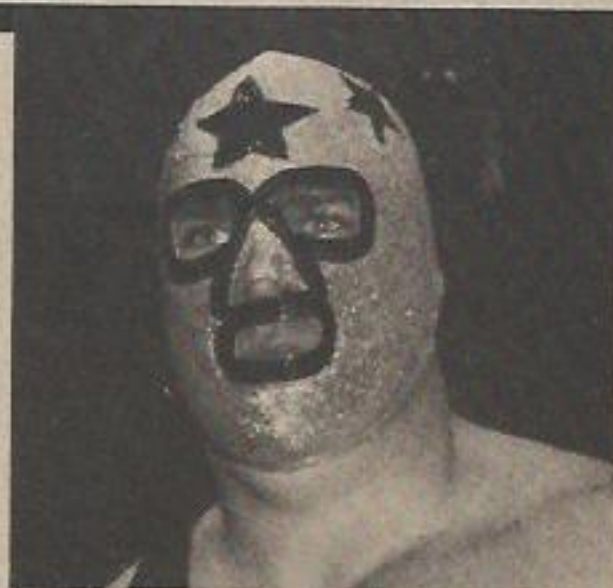


WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

(Continued from Page 29)

MASKED SUPERSTAR

"Banned from wrestling in the entire United States. Can you believe that? And nobody can even tell me how long it's going to last. Just because I lost my temper against that NWA toadie George Scott on television, they all want to get rid of me. Well, before long they'll realize how much they need me and beg for my return. If you ask me, though, it just isn't fair."



DUSTY RHODES

"Ric Flair, Ric Flair, everyone wants to know what I think about Ric Flair. Well, let me tell you here and now, he's about as useful as a jackass in a bull riding competition. Why don't people ask me what I think about my chances of regaining the title are? I'll tell you this: Ric Flair is not going to last very long, no sir! Not if I have anything to say about it!"



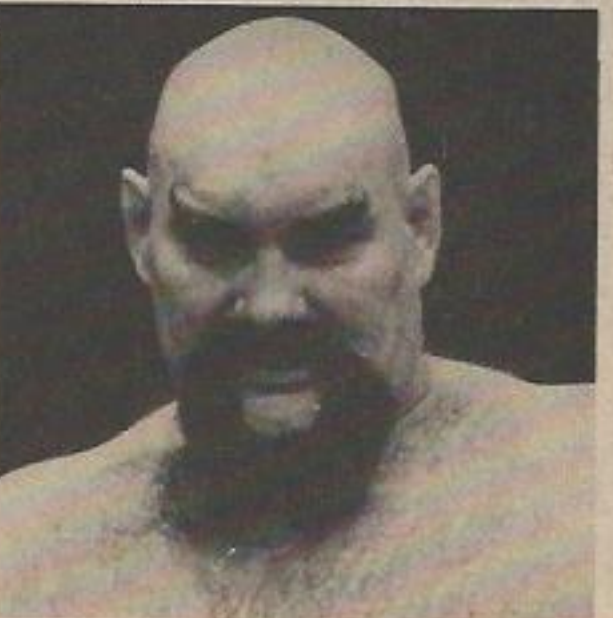
KEN PATERA

"Look at this colossal retard Hulk Hogan: all he's been doing is hanging around with clowns like Tito Santana and people like that. And he expects to flit his way to the AWA championship? He's got to be kidding. All he is is a gutless coward, that's it. If he keeps on this course, he'll never get anywhere at all, much less close to the title."



OX BAKER

"Dusty Rhodes is a pansy. You can see that clearly by the way he lost his title. It's shameful, if you ask me. He never deserved to be champion at all. And Mike Graham. Mike says he feels like he's wrestling at his best in one out of 10 matches. Well, he looks like he's at his worst in 10 out of 10! Graham and Rhodes. One is worse than the other!"



KING'S COURT

(Continued from Page 6)

realize I was in a fog."

Well, the fog has lifted. During the past few months, there has been a vitality about Brisco's wrestling. In Florida, Jack has become virtually unbeatable. His maneuvers are once again crisp and accurate. But this is a sport where being good is not enough. You've got to have proof.



Forever popular with fans old and young, Brisco takes the time to sign some autographs.

On the floor, right next to the magazine, was an impressive-looking championship belt. It was the Missouri state strap, and it currently belongs to Brisco. He had upset Ted DiBiase to win the title.

"This is a big step," said Brisco, gazing down at the jewel-studded piece of leather. "Everyone knows the Missouri title is a stepping stone to the NWA belt. Last time I won the Missouri title, I beat Race a few weeks later to become world champion. I'm looking for lightning to strike twice. So tell Ric Flair he'd better watch out."

As Brisco got ready to leave, he scooped up the belt and the copy of *PWI*. While walking through the door, he turned over his shoulder and said, "I expect to see my name in the NWA ratings next month. And I promise it's going to stay there for a long, long time." ☐

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RINGSIDE

(Continued from Page 8)



Chief Jay Strongbow, for years among the most popular wrestlers in the WWF, is building a loyal following in the Mid-South. Strongbow is in excellent shape and should work his way back into the ratings before long.

"You know Slaughter thinks he is hot stuff," Ricky says. "Well, he calls me a buck private. He's gonna be pretty embarrassed when a man of his rank is beaten by buck private me!"

The Mid-Southern belt is now being worn proudly by Blackjack Mulligan Sr., after his victory over Big John Studd... Verne Gagne is doing occasional color commentary on the AWA TV wrestling shows... There are no hard feelings between ex-Missouri state champion Ted DiBiase and his conqueror Jack Brisco. As a matter of fact, they're contemplating teaming!

The Masked Superstar has been banned from wrestling in the United States for an indefinite period for hitting NWA official George Scott on a nationwide TV interview. How long he will be in exile is not known, but his lawyers are busy trying to get him reinstated.

Chief Jay Strongbow is wrestling in the Mid-Southern area... Fred Blassie is negotiating with Mid-Atlantic promoters on behalf of his client, Killer Khan... Bruiser Bob Sweetan, the Central States champion, is trying to eliminate "House of Humperdink" members, one by one. They include



Hussein Arab, stomping a helpless opponent with his allegedly loaded boot, is being managed by Scandor Akbar in Louisiana.

Ten-Gu, Chang Chung, Jim Dillon, and The Monk.

Hussein "Iron Sheik" Arab is wrestling in Louisiana and Mississippi under the management of Scandor Akbar. "We are the perfect duo of talent and brains," Akbar states. "Together we will run cowards like Junkyard Dog and Mike George out of wrestling." By the way, Junkyard and George are one of the most talented tag teams to ever wrestle in the area.

Big Feud: former tag teammates Ted DiBiase and Bob Roop. Roop turned bad for the money and tried unsuccessfully to get Ted to join him. Feuds between former friends are always the worst... The Grand Wizard and Greg Valentine are convinced that Bob Backlund was left so tired by his long, grueling bouts with King Kong Mosca and Magnificent Muraco that Greg will definitely beat him for the WWF title. "Backlund is a shell of himself," says Wiz. "Easy pickins. Easy pickins."

Tommy Rich won Georgia's "Most Popular Wrestler" contest and he asked us to thank his legion of fans for him. It's done Tommy!

That's all for now. See you at the matches! □

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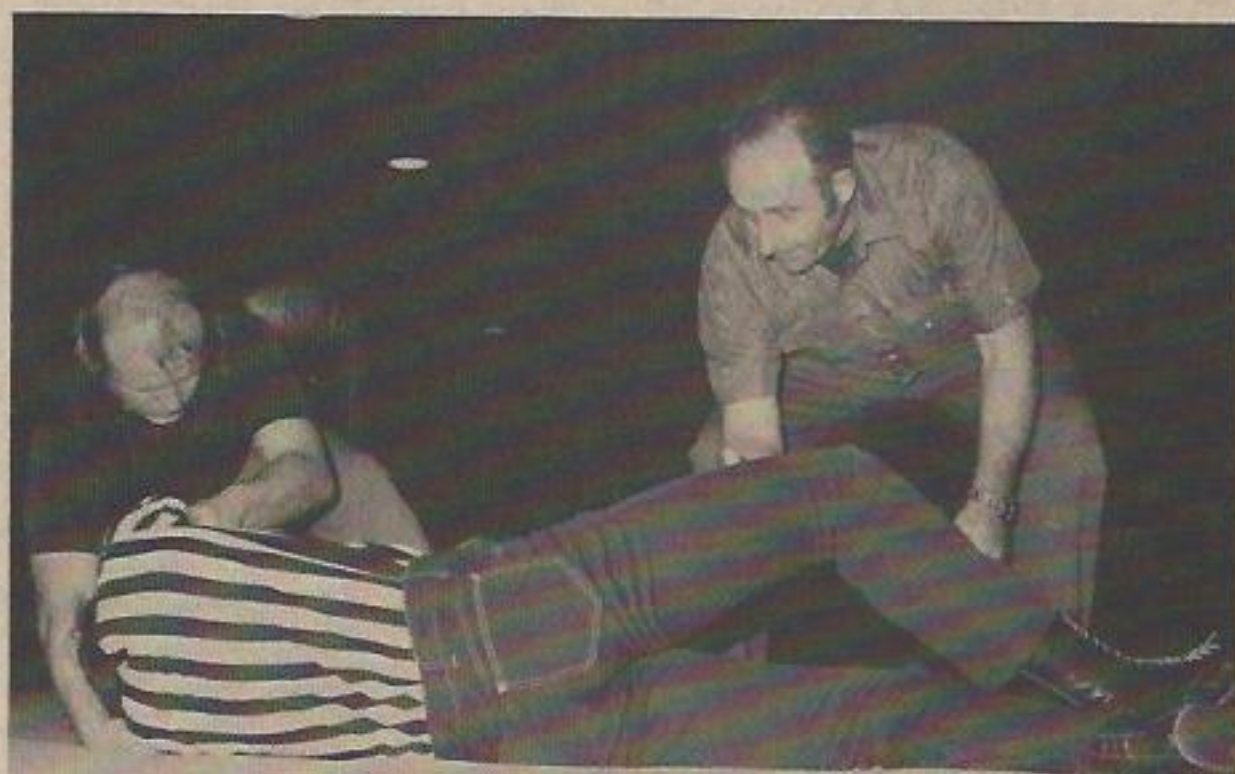
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DRESSING ROOM CONFIDENTIAL

(Continued from Page 10)



Referee Bobby Lane is helped by Dory Funk Jr. and a ringside official after being viciously attacked by Cyclone Negro in 1973. The NWA has finally recognized its responsibility to protect its own referees.

NWA is taking steps to stop outside-the-ring brawling. If two wrestlers begin to battle next to the ring, the match will be stopped and a double disqualification declared. This is a wise move. Serious injuries caused by the use of chairs, ringposts, and other dangerous objects can now be avoided.

Number four is another important point. While enforcement of this old rule will prevent a man like Harley Race from delivering his devastating flying headbutt from the top rope, wrestling fans will be deprived of seeing a man like Mil Mascaras make his spectacular daring dives. But again, this rule should cut down on unnecessary injuries.

Of all the points brought out at the meeting, I am most pleased about the final two. They get right to the crux of the problem. If referees are not able to enforce the rules without fear of retaliation from somebody twice their size, the rules can be clarified from now until the end of time, and nothing will change.

I would like to see more men disqualified for repeated usage

of fists or choking or karate chops to the throat, but unless the NWA protects its own referees, this can never happen. If the NWA safeguards the referees by enforcing rules eight and nine, the referees will better be able to enforce points one through seven.

While I commend the NWA for calling a meeting of such magnitude to discuss a problem it has continually downplayed, I strongly object to the Alliance blaming the lack of order within the rings on the referees. The inadequacies lie within its own organization. In the past, the NWA has been unwilling to enforce even some of its most basic rules. If its new approach is successful, perhaps the AWA and WWF will follow suit.

In a matter of a few years, the sport's rulebreakers will become frustrated with constant disqualifications, fines, and suspensions. They will be forced to either alter their style or leave the sport entirely. If the sport of wrestling is serious about its own rulebook, now is the time to show it. Brighter days could be ahead. □

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ON ASSIGNMENT

(Continued from Page 12)

exactly what I meant.

"Yup, much worse," he replied, his eyes glued to the red- and yellow-striped design on the placemat. "Losing to Race, well, I could almost live with that. At least the guy's a pro, a guy who paid his dues, you know what I mean? I'm no fan of Race, you know that. But he doesn't exactly disgrace the title either. But losing to Flair . . ." He paused several seconds before continuing. I thought I saw his Adam's apple bob up and down in his throat. "I don't know. I just don't know."

"Flair is all glamour, all flash and no substance. You may not believe this, but I was actually overconfident going in against him. Me, Dusty Rhodes, who takes every battle carefully, a veteran who knows you can't underestimate anyone in this crazy business. I even load up my Winchester when I spot a cockroach in my house. But against Flair I wasn't really prepared. It's awfully lonely at the top, and when you need someone to help you sort things out . . . well, someone's not always there."

The next question seemed obvious to me. And Dusty knew I was going to ask it. At this precise moment, we were thinking on the exact same wavelength.

"Are you saying that when you are a challenger, you had more friends, more support, more help from the fans?"

"Sure," he answered. "Everyone loves the underdog. You should've seen the cards and letters I got after Flair took the title. Outnumbered the letters I got when I won the title by 3-1. I'm the American Dream again now. Everyone loves me. Everyone loves the loser."



The instant Rhodes captured the NWA belt for the first time, a big change came over the man. No longer would he be content to be just the fans' favorite; Dusty got a taste of what it meant to be the best in the world and he wants to get that feeling back again.

Rhodes lifted his head and finished his third glass of milk. His eyes were shut. I was sure that if he had opened them, tears would've been waiting to fall.

"I always valued the fans more than anything," he continued. "I always said I'd rather have them than any title. Well, I was wrong. After tasting the title, I know that's what I was put on this earth to have. I hope the fans don't misunderstand this. I still appreciate them, but they all love a loser. And Dusty Rhodes stopped being a loser the first time they raised his hand and called him a champion."

I was speechless. So was he. We both sat without saying a word. □

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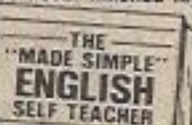
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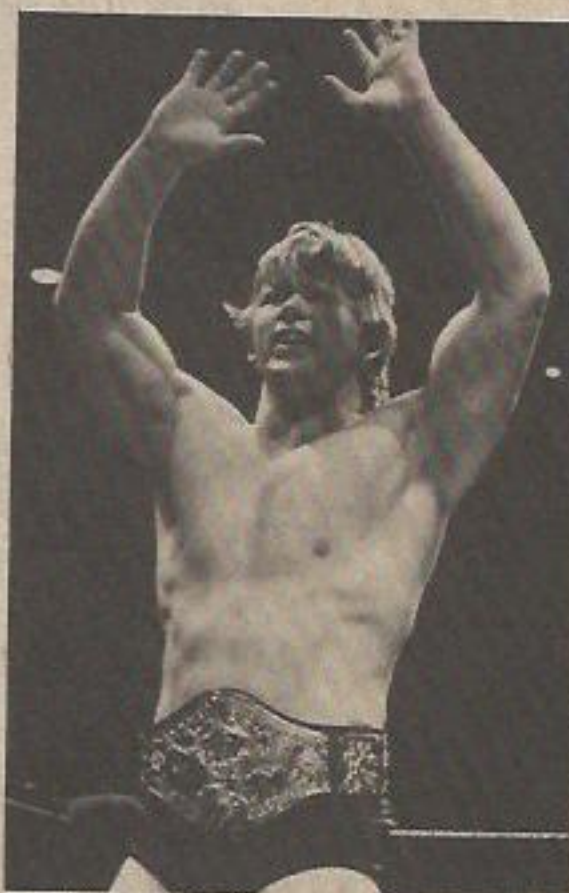
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IN FOCUS

(Continued from Page 18)



BOB BACKLUND

BACKLUND IN CONTROVERSY

Letters are beginning to pour into these offices. The Don "Magnificent" Muraco fans

are calling it a sham, a payoff, and a cheat. Backlund fans are celebrating what has appeared to be the latest reaffirmation of the WWF champion's greatness. As the mail indicates, though, there remains a great deal of controversy in Backlund's latest Madison Square Garden title defense. Apparently Muraco's foot was on the rope as the referee made the three-count to end the match and declare Backlund as having successfully retained his WWF belt. Although I was at ringside during that match, I personally did not notice Muraco's foot on the rope. Along with you, I await the return of film from the lab to see once and for all what the truth of that evening was. Once again, the WWF title is catapulted into the whirlwinds of controversy.

MASCARAS STIFLED

A well-deserved plug ought to go to the incredible Mil Mascaras who seems to be enduring an inordinately large number of effectively worthless matches. His recent match at New Jersey's new Meadowlands arena against Magnificent Muraco was the exception in a long string of opponents that have offered Mil everything BUT good competition. What can the masked marvel do against such wrestlers as Bulldog Brower? Nothing except maybe obliterate the poor guy in three minutes or less. The fans who come out to the arenas to see Mil in action deserve to witness the man at his best, not



MIL MASCARAS

coasting his way through easy matches. If given the chance, Mascaras could likely work his way through the ranks to become a prime championship contender. The only problem is getting that chance in the first place.

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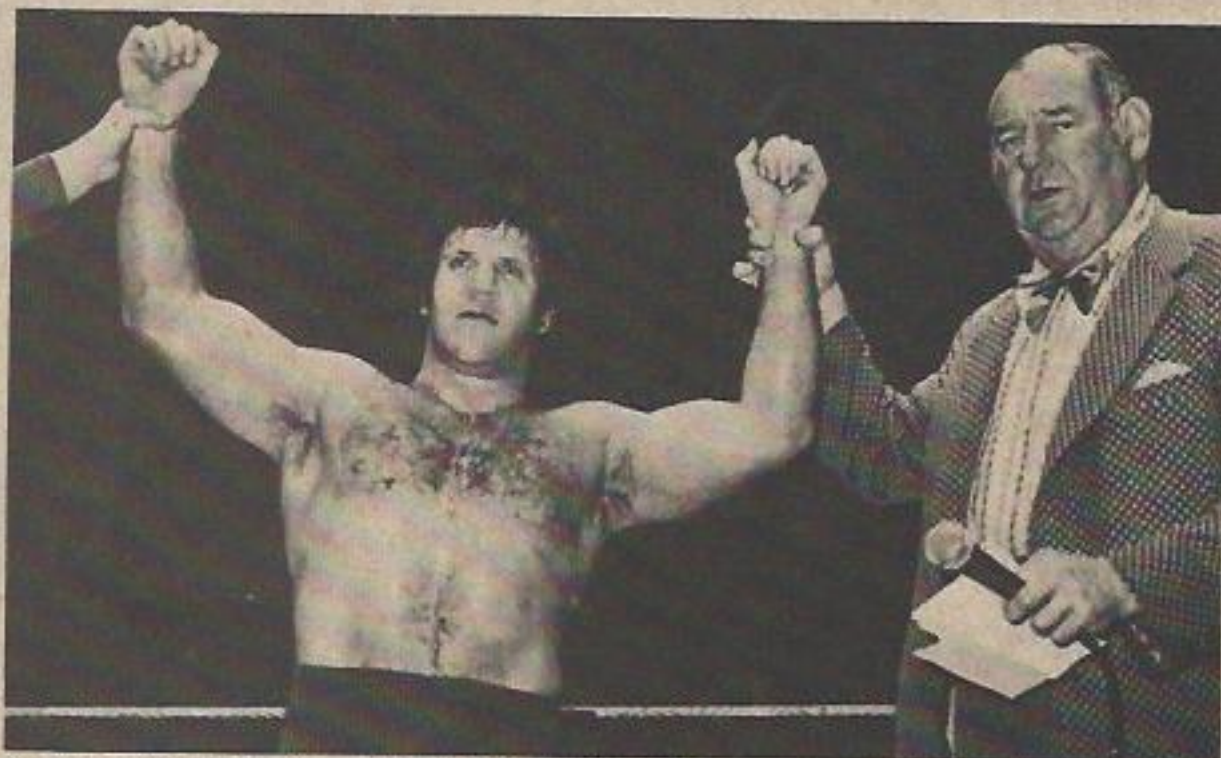
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PRESS CONFERENCE

(Continued from Page 25)



A common sight throughout his glorious 22-year career, Bruno Sammartino has his arms raised in victory. Bruno wanted to get out of the sport while he was still on top.

said for being that champion, but I've been there twice already, and I've been there the longest. No, it's time for me to step aside. There have been a lot of great wrestlers in the past, and there are going to be a lot more in the future. What makes this sport great is that there are a lot of great men involved at the same time, you know? Unfortunately, there are also a lot of despicable men involved, too.

SAKS: Who do you rate as some of the great wrestlers of today?

SAMMARTINO: Well, Bob Backlund is the WWF champion now, and I think he's really deserving of the honor. He is a fine champion, and he has the attitude that a champion has to have. I hope his title reign lasts for a long, long time. Then there's always Mil Mascaras, the king of the masked wrestlers as far as I am concerned. He is amazing. He is so strong, and at the same time so scientifically gentle, and that combination is very impressive. He is an athlete

in every sense of the word.

BROCK: How about Bruno Jr.?

SAMMARTINO: Ah, yes, my son. I am very proud of what Bruno Jr. has been doing. He is developing into a superb wrestler, and I feel that with the proper guidance he will become the champion someday. Since I am retiring, I hope to be able to devote some time to helping my son along the way.

FARHOOD: Bruno, Your last match was against George "The Animal" Steele. How did you prepare for that historic match?

SAMMARTINO: I really didn't do anything different. Steele is a maniac, and that's all there is to it. One correction, though, Steele was my last American match. In a few days, I'll be off to Japan for a short farewell tour, and then... *a rivederla*, wrestling!

SAKS: Bruno, thank you for being with us on "Press Conference." Best of luck in the future.

SAMMARTINO: Thank you, Stu. And thank you America for 22 years of loyal support. □

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BOB BACKLUND

(Continued from Page 28)

in the WWF. I realize that this may occasionally lead to what some people might consider to be unfair decisions, but I'm afraid that for the sake of consistency and the rules, that is the way it must be. Once the



Muraco pulls back on Backlund's chin, exposing the champion's throat to his Asiatic spike. Many fans don't care how Backlund keeps his title as long as he keeps it away from men like Muraco.

referee makes a ruling, it is final, and is unable to be altered in any way, shape, or form."

Yet the questions remain: Do the referees purposely favor Bob Backlund? Do they see these infractions of the rules and choose not to recognize their existence? Do they subconsciously want to see him remain as champion?

Unfortunately, the mere fact that these questions are asked clouds an otherwise brilliant championship reign. And until they are no longer being asked, Bob Backlund may never receive his deserved credit as one of the sport's all-time greats. □

Ric Flair— Harley Race

(Continued from Page 34)

match, Flair came out of his corner fulfilling the promise he had made to himself. He did in fact give it his all, and Race was the first to realize this.

Race was, as well, the first to bleed in this contest of brutality. Scrambling to defend himself throughout the course of the match, Flair was too aggressive, breaking through Race's defenses and deeply wounding his head.

Angered by the fact that he had allowed himself to be cut in this way, Race retaliated with a vengeance. He cracked Flair's head open, virtually blinding the new champion from the blood streaming into his eyes. In turn, Flair became angered as well and recovered to defend his new title.

"He has got to expect to be bloodied if he is going to defend his title like that," said Race after the match. "If a wrestler is going to be so aggressive that he is going to draw blood each defense, then he must expect to be bloodied in turn. It's the price one pays for being that aggressive, though I must admit, Flair seems willing to pay the bill."

Soon after that match in Des Moines, a title defense against Tommy Rich in Columbus, Ohio, also developed into a bloody melee. It seems as if Flair's early defenses are beginning to form some sort of pattern.

"I'm determined to keep this title," Flair growled, "and I'll defend it against anyone who tries to stand in my way. You can count on that." □



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Mr. Wrestling II

(Continued from Page 31)

earmarks of a bad guy, then I plead guilty all the way.

But I've been avoiding the real reason about why I almost went to extremes in my personality. It is that question to which I would now like to address myself.

For many, many years, a lot of people have put a great amount of faith in me and my work. They look up to me as a man who exhibits honor and loyalty, who adheres to impeccable standards of fair play.

As the recipient of such faith, I feel I owe a special debt to those people who place their faith in me. They feel that I should be the conscience of wrestlers in my area. So be it. I decided to organize a special test for men like Tommy Rich, Kevin Von Erich, and Bruno Sammartino Jr.



II, bodyslamming Studd, regrets his recent bad behavior, but feels it was a necessary test for Georgia's young scientific wrestlers.

My mail indicates that people believe I set the standard for men like Rich, Von Erich, Sammartino, and many others. If I go off the track, they tell me, these others are likely to follow. I am, in their words, a pace-setter. I decided to see how much of a standard-bearer I actually am.

I devised what I felt to be a foolproof plan. Take some time, I

thought . . . maybe three months or more. Slowly, and almost imperceptibly, alter my actions. Change them ever so slightly with each appearance. Begin to make the change from scientific wrestler to rulebreaker. In actuality, appear to make the change.

I wanted to know, both for myself and for my fans, exactly how far someone like Tommy Rich or Bruno Jr. would follow in my footsteps. I didn't know quite what to expect, and I sure didn't expect what soon happened. But I am pleased with the results of my test.

I am happy to report that neither Tommy Rich nor Kevin Von Erich nor Bruno Jr. nor any of the other wrestlers I was keeping my eyes on during this time wavered from their scientific styles. They did not follow me into the black areas of rulebreaking. I am proud to say that all these men remained steadfast in their beliefs, and did not change one bit in the face of my own changes.

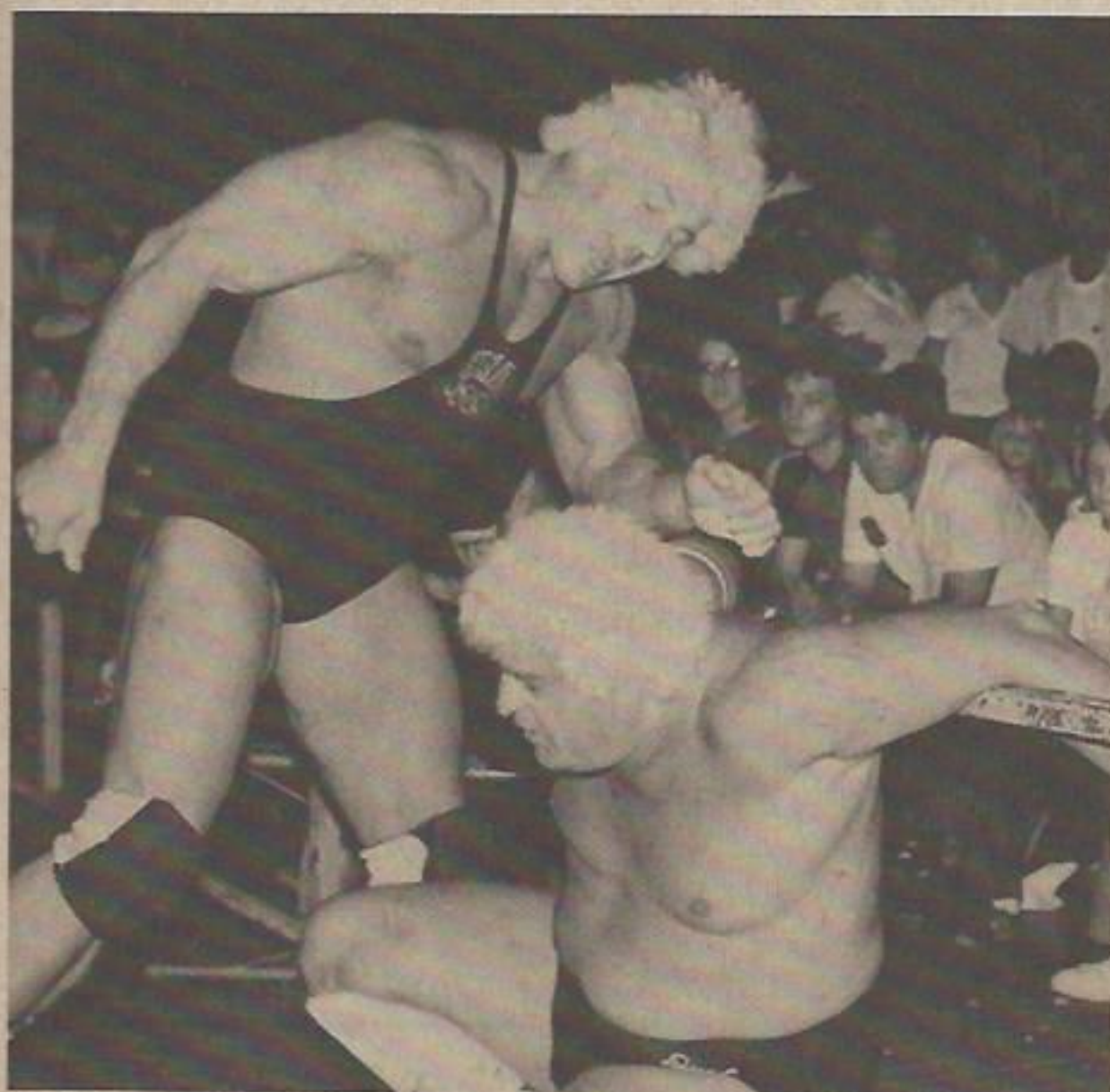
Furthermore, some of these men even expressed concern over the state of my own affairs. For this I am doubly proud, and these men (they know who they are) should be proud of themselves.

Now some readers may say "who are you to take matters into your own hands? What right to you have?" Well, I was implored by hundreds of letters to do something similar to this test, this ideological gauntlet. The precise form of testing was something that I had to come up with myself.

I would finally like to take this opportunity to publicly congratulate everyone I have mentioned in this article, and particularly Tommy Rich, Kevin Von Erich, and Bruno Jr. Stand proud, gentlemen, you've proven your worth beyond a shadow of a doubt . . . to the world. □

KEN PATERA

(Continued from Page 47)



Patera defends his Georgia title against Dusty Rhodes this past June. Patera stayed in the area for a few months and then inexplicably forfeited his belt and left the area. The former Olympian will not establish himself for any length of time in one area.

with my colleagues, I've come to the conclusion that Mr. Patera is suffering from what I've termed *cacoethes absentia*. Strictly translated, it means "a mania for absence." Applied to the case in question, it means that Mr. Patera has an irresistible tendency to run away from himself.

Obviously, upon the most cursory analysis, this man can't possibly run from himself. He may try in the physical sense by continually uprooting himself and engaging in a constant change of venue. Psychologically, however, he is trapped within himself, unable to escape whatever deep problems may be troubling him and, in turn, causing him to act in this manner.

I cannot begin to speculate on the nature of these troubles. I

have not had the opportunity to sit down and discuss the situation with Mr. Patera, though I hope that someday I might have the opportunity to do so.

I can, however, say with some certainty: Ken Patera is a deeply troubled man trying to escape from himself. It is a situation that can only continue unless he comes to grips with whatever it is that continues to gnaw at his subconscious psyche. It is a situation that could be reversed and taken care of, but only Ken Patera has the power to initiate that sort of a change. Both personally and professionally, I feel that working towards that goal would be a great step in the right direction.

I feel you've got a long, hard road ahead, Ken. I wish you luck on your journey. □

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